LONG LIVE VINYL

THE NATIONAL
On their first No.1 album

ISSUE 08
NOVEMBER 2017
£6.99

Classic Album
Automatic For The People

THE SMITHS
Deluxe boxset reviewed

FEATURED
Japanese vinyl
Essential country
Hiss Golden Messenger

1990 TO 2007

VINYL'S LOST YEARS

- Discover hidden gems in your collection
- 20 essential records to buy today
- Britpop's most valuable classics

REVIEWED
ELP, Ian Dury, Talk Talk, Philip Selway, Leroy Hutson, David Crosby, Van Morrison, Liam Gallagher, The Style Council…

THE MAGAZINE FOR VINYL LOVERS

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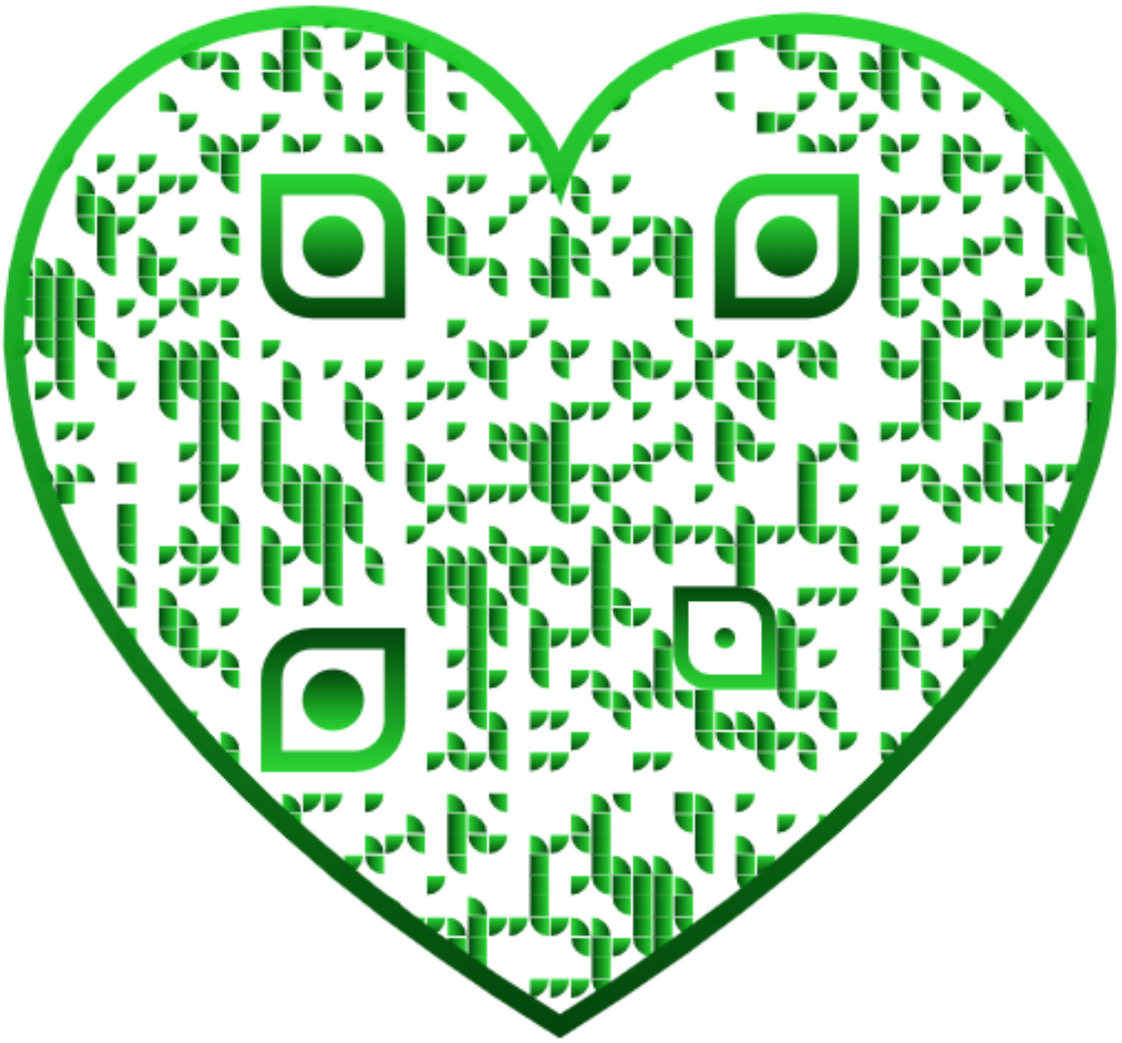


LEGACY

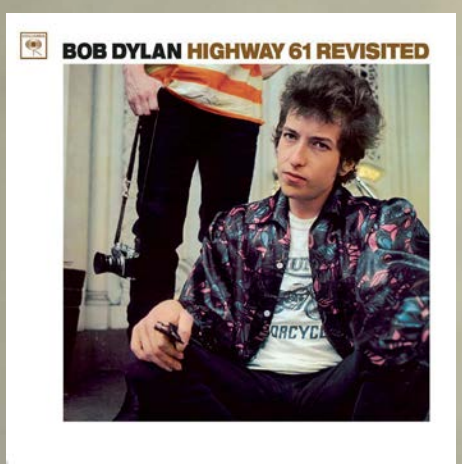
CLASSIC ALBUMS & HITS COLLECTIONS

AVAILABLE NOW

Bruce Springsteen
Born To Run
1LP

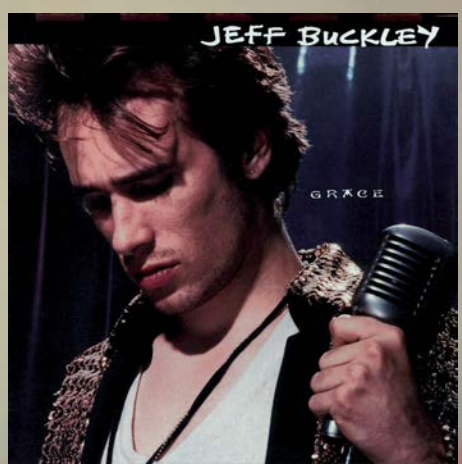
Paul Simon
Graceland
1LP
Available from 06.10.2017

Carole King
Tapestry
1LP



Bob Dylan
Highway 61 Revisited
1LP

Jimi Hendrix
Experience Hendrix
The Best Of Jimi Hendrix
2LP



Jeff Buckley
Grace
1LP

www.wearesonylegacy.com

SONY MUSIC

Welcome...

'Good things come to those who wait' felt like an apposite phrase when putting together Issue 8 of *Long Live Vinyl*. Our cover feature tells the story of 'Vinyl's Lost Years', the period from 1990 to 2007 when vinyl production and sales nosedived to an all-time low.

Plenty of observers prematurely sounded the format's death knell in the face of the surge in popularity of the CD and the trendy new kids on the block – digital downloads and streaming. However, the true believers held firm throughout two decades that saw some of the best records since popular music's halcyon days in the 1960s and 70s made – yet pressed in tiny quantities. By the nadir of 2007, UK vinyl sales had slumped to 205,000 copies a year. Now, with vinyl *en vogue* once more and production ramping back up, those who filled their boots with alt-rock, Britpop, trip-hop and hip-hop in the 90s and 2000s find themselves with collections worth a very tidy sum – often disproportionate to the quality of some of the music (£300 for a copy of Keane's *Hopes And Fears*, anyone?). The reward for riding out the storm has been handsome indeed – congratulations if your shelves are stocked with original pressings of records by Blur, Pulp, The Verve, Spiritualized, Nirvana, Massive Attack, Radiohead and The White Stripes…

Congratulations if your shelves are stocked with original pressings of records from the 90s and 2000s

One band who know the value of patience are The National, who we speak to in our lead interview. Emerging from Brooklyn's indie and alt-rock turn-of-the-century talent factory, they watched from the sidelines as peers such as The Strokes, Interpol and Yeah Yeah Yeahs shot to success. There was no immediate breakthrough for Matt Berninger and co, but they played the long game. Nearly two decades into their career, they're now one of the world's biggest indie-rock bands and have just landed their first No. 1 album with their most experimental record to date – *Sleep Well Beast* – on the UK's own 4AD label. We meet up with Aaron and Bryce Dessner, the band's guitarist twins, on p40, to find out how they did it.

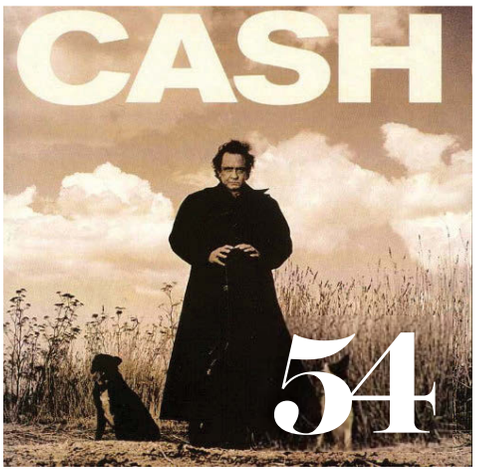
Elsewhere, we delve into the fascinating world of Japanese vinyl and report from Record Store Day Summer Camp in New Orleans – where some of the industry's brightest minds gathered to talk about the future of the format we love. Our Classic Album is R.E.M.'s stunning masterwork, *Automatic For The People*, another 1990s album that's worth a few quid today – and it's not a bad record, either…

Gary Walker *Editor*

LONGLIVEVINYL

88

72



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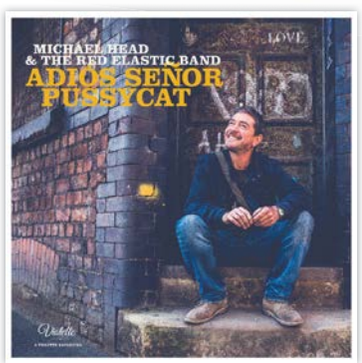

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LONG LIVE VINYL

Features

RSD SUMMER CAMP 20
Inside Record Store Day's annual industry get-together in New Orleans

COVER STORY
VINYL'S LOST YEARS 24
Betwen 1990 and 2007, vinyl was under threat of extinction. We discover some hidden gems hailing from that era

COMPETITIONS!
WIN RARE RECORDS AND HEADPHONES 33
Win limited-edition LPs from Run Out Groove and Audio-Technica headphones

JAPANESE VINYL 34
1980s Japanese re-releases and rarities

THE NATIONAL 40
How indie-rock's triumphant miserablists fought their way to stardom

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER 48
Folk-rocker MC Taylor's love of the South

THE ESSENTIAL **COUNTRY** 54
Move 'em on, head 'em up… 40 killer country records for your collection

LABEL STORIES
ALCHEMY MASTERING 66
Renowned London mastering experts explain the intricacies of their process

CLASSIC ALBUM
AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE 72
How R.E.M. followed up a hit album with a deep and enduring artistic statement

TALKING SHOP
BANQUET RECORDS 84
A vinyl community based around a thriving shop in Kingston upon Thames

THE TRIP **EAST LONDON** 88
Exploring the vinyl-collecting hotbed of Shoreditch and its surrounds

108

News

ON THE RECORD 7
News, plus regular features, including:

CRATE DIGGING
Andy Partridge 9

SIMON SAYS 11
Simon Raymonde of Bella Union

STORY BEHIND THE SLEEVE 12
Grace Jones – *Island Life*

ON THE RADAR 14
L.A. Witch

STUDIO SNAPSHOT 18
Blondie

DIGGING FOR VICTORY 96
Mark O'Shaughnessy of Resolution Records

Regulars

CHOICE CUTS 71
Sun Kil Moon – *Ghosts Of The Great Highway*

THE BIG REISSUE 97
Omerta Inc.

HOW TO BUY... 114
Cartridges

HI-FI DIY... 118
Valve-amp Revamp, Part 2

THE VINYLIST 122
Show off your record collection here

Reviews

ALBUMS
RE-RELEASES 98
The latest re-releases and boxsets

NEW RELEASES 103
A round-up of the best new music

GENRE HOPPING 107
Electronica

GEAR
TURNTABLES AND SPEAKERS 108
The latest releases from Audio-Technica, Roberts and Roth

LONG LIVE VINYL

The *Long Live Vinyl* team pick their favourite records from 1990-2007…

Gary Walker
The National
Boxer

Laura K Williams
Manic Street Preachers
Everything Must Go

Alison Zak-Collins
R.E.M.
Automatic For The People

Andy Cottle
Primal Scream
Screamadelica

Ian Peel
The Fireman
Rushes

Meet our expert contributors…

Simon Raymonde
Simon was the bassist and keyboard player in the Cocteau Twins and founded the band Snowbird. He launched the independent label Bella Union in 1997. His label has been a home to bands including Fleet Foxes, The Flaming Lips, Midlake, Father John Misty, John Grant, Explosions In The Sky and Lanterns On The Lake. He's also produced many great albums.

Ben Wardle
Having clogged up the nation's homes with Sleeper and Wannadies records in the 1990s, Ben left his job as an A&R man to become a writer. He's written for all the usual mags and newspapers, had several books published, including *The Art Of The LP*, and is a uni lecturer in Music Business. He writes and presents regular music columns for the BBC's *Front Row*.

Laura Barton
Laura is a writer and broadcaster. A regular contributor to *The Guardian* and *The Observer*, she is also a contributing editor at *Q* magazine, and an A&R scout for a music publishing company. Her BBC Radio 4 series *Notes From A Musical Island* returns next year, and she is currently hard at work on a book about music and sadness.

Gary Tipp
Gary has been collecting vinyl since time immemorial and still can't walk past a charity shop without going in on the off chance there's a mint treasure nestled in between the easy listening and the obligatory copy of Paul Young's *No Parlez*. He's also been writing words for magazines for longer than anyone can remember.

Giacomo Lee
Giacomo Lee is an author and DJ from London dedicated to music new and old from East Asia. His youth was spent interviewing the likes of Hood and Stars and he's since written for *Shortlist*, *io9* and Japan's *Metropolis* magazine. His proudest achievement is his novel *Funereal*, a darkly comedic look at the shadowy side of the K-pop industry.

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On the record

TALK TALK: THE PARTY'S STARTED

New Talk Talk reissues of 1982 debut *The Party's Over* and 1984's *It's My Life* to kickstart a fresh series of vinyl releases from the art-pop band's back catalogue

Two of the most important albums in art-pop history are finally set to get new vinyl editions on 20 October. Talk Talk's 1982 debut *The Party's Over* and its follow-up, their 1984 worldwide breakthrough, *It's My Life* kick off what we understand will be a series of reissues of the band's studio output. *The Party's Over* features the group's first four singles, *Talk Talk, Today, Mirror Man* and *Another Word*. Amazingly, considering their quality, none of the singles from *It's My Life* – the album's title track, *Such A Shame* and *Dum Dum Girl* – managed to scrape the UK Top 40. With no bonus tracks for these reissues, the non-LP cut that bridged the two albums – 1983's *My Foolish Friend* single – appears to be orphaned.

But these two releases represent some long-overdue attention in the vinyl world to some classic recordings. And although no official release dates have been set for vinyl reissues of the rest of Talk Talk's studio catalogue – *The Colour Of Spring, Spirit Of Eden* and *Laughing Stock* – it now seems only a matter of time.

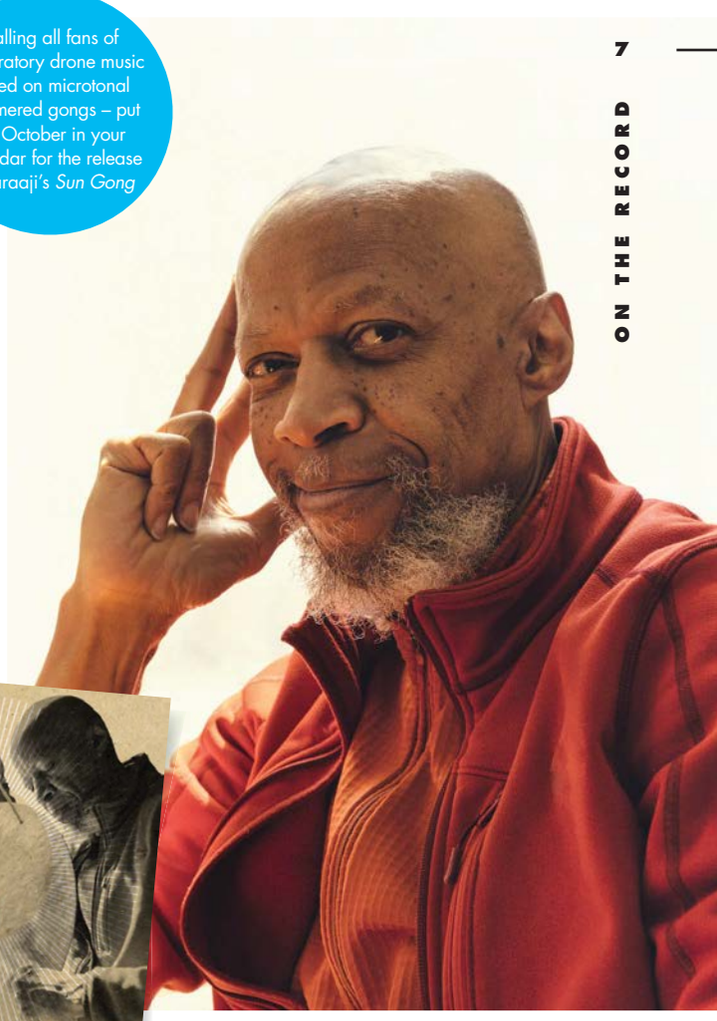
ABRA-CADABRA
Atlanta-based singer-songwriter-producer ABRA has notched up three million Spotify streams of her 2015 debut *Rose*, enough to bring it to the attention of Ninja Tune, who give it a double-vinyl reissue on 6 October.

DURY'S OUT
The 40th anniversary of Ian Dury's *New Boots And Panties!!* debut is marked on 27 October with a vinyl reissue, adding a pull-out eight-page booklet and a previously unreleased concert from July 1978 on CD.

FRANKIE SAYS REISSUE
Frankie Goes To Hollywood's groundbreaking debut, *Welcome To The Pleasuredome*, is reissued on 180g vinyl on 27 October with an additional booklet of notes, dates and artefacts.

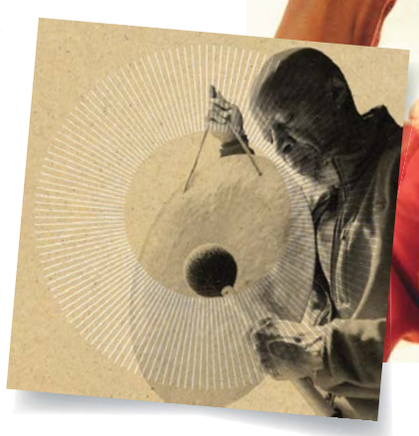
Going For A Gong

Calling all fans of exploratory drone music based on microtonal hammered gongs – put 13 October in your calendar for the release of Laraaji's *Sun Gong*



Ambient fans, sit back and absorb these incoming releases… Following All Saints Records' career-spanning retrospective of Laraaji, *Celestial Music 1978-2011*, 13 October sees the release of a limited clear-vinyl version of *Sun Gong*: "Two long-form drone pieces that explore the microtonal possibilities of a hammered gong processed through various electronic effects." This will be followed up two weeks later with the double-vinyl LP, *Bring On The Sun*, and rare UK live dates.

Also out next month, reissues of what *FACT* magazine hails as "one of the greatest ambient albums ever made", *Translucence/Drift Music* by Harold Budd and John Foxx. It forms part of a limited triple-vinyl set (bundled with a signed print by Foxx) that also takes in the pair's 2011 collaboration with the late Ruben Garcia, *Nighthawks*. The Demon Records set is designed by Jonathan Barnbrook, who won a Grammy for the sleeve of David Bowie's *Blackstar*, and said it had been "an honour to work with John Foxx and in particular on the vinyl editions of these albums".



On the record

BLAME IT ON THE SPOOKY
***Scream*, the *Thriller*-oriented, Halloween-ready Michael Jackson compilation released on 29 September, gets a glow-in-the-dark vinyl edition on 27 October. Highlights are *Scream* (with Janet Jackson) and *Somebody's Watching Me* (with Rockwell).**

RECORD BOOKS
Two further volumes of Bloomsbury's intense album-story paperbacks, *33 1/3*, are published this month. Emily Mackay investigates Björk's *Homogenic*, while Jenn Pelly pens a "love letter to the iconic post-punk, all-female band", The Raincoats.

THE HORROR, THE HORROR
LAND SOME WALLFISCH AND A ROEG ONE

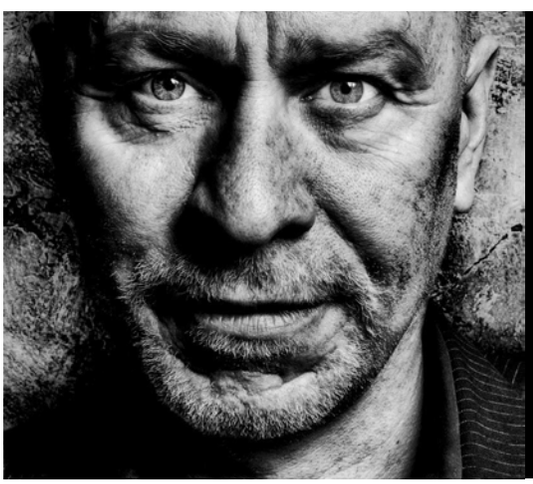
The two most elaborate soundtrack releases announced this month are both from the chiller/horror genre. Following a competition organised by *Creative Review* and the BFI, Benio Urbanowicz has reimagined the cover of Nicolas Roeg's 1973 horror flick *Don't Look Now*. He delivers a die-cut gatefold sleeve to present a score which was the debut work of Pino Donaggio, long-term collaborator with Brian De Palma and writer of Dusty Springfield's seminal *You Don't Have To Say You Love Me*. Meanwhile, 27 October sees the release on white vinyl of the score to *Annabelle: Creation*, the work of composer and Hans Zimmer collaborator Benjamin Wallfisch, whose recent credits include *Dunkirk* and *The Cure For Wellness*. Soundtrack label Silva Screen promise some intriguing packaging for *Annabelle: Creation* with "an outer sleeve printed with a concealed image inside"…

#DIARYDATES

Vinyl-related happenings coming up over the next few weeks…

The Selecter reunite at London's Roundhouse on 6 October. Their new album *Daylight* is out on both yellow and black vinyl on the same day… The next day, The Blow Monkeys play the 100 Club to mark the release of their new LP, *Wild River*… Primus' new album *The Desaturating Seven* has two distinct pressings: "A desaturated version drained of most of its colour with a white vinyl," their label explains, "and a version with full-colour sleeve and clear vinyl with rainbow splatter."… An expanded, four-180g boxed edition of The Sisters Of Mercy's 1992 compilation *Some Girls Wander By Mistake* is out now.

STAX LIGHTNING
DJ Richard Searling has selected 14 Northern Soul rarities – including *I'm The One Who Loves You* by Darrell Banks – to be pressed across seven singles for *The Stax 7s Box* set, out now.

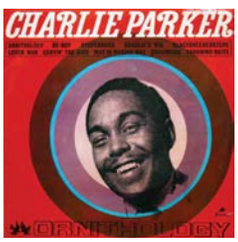


THIS IS THE THE DAY
THE THE ANNOUNCE BOXSET AND COMEBACK SHOWS

Not since 2002's Meltdown Festival show (which tied in with the release of their *In The AM* collaboration with our founding editor Ian Peel) has Matt Johnson taken to the stage. But what we're most excited about is a triple-vinyl boxset that Johnson announced on the same day as his return to public life. Out 20 October, the *Radio Cinéola Trilogy* contains three 180g black records and a 48-page booklet curating the artist's thoughts and recordings since 2002, including the previously unreleased early-2000s compilation *The End Of The Day*, featuring covers by Thomas Leer and Anna Domino.

CRATE DIGGING WITH... Andy Partridge

This Is Pop is a brand-new documentary set to air on Sky Arts this month, charting the colourful story-so-far of XTC and their psychedelic alter-egos, The Dukes Of Stratosphear. **Ian Peel** asks the band's frontman, Andy Partridge, to name his 10 most influential records



CHARLIE PARKER

ORNITHOLOGY

"There is a particular point, just before Charlie's solo, where a female in the audience shouts out 'Go baby!'. I would drop the stylus on this spot over and over and over, to the point where I irreparably damaged the disc."

THE TONY WILLIAMS LIFETIME

EMERGENCY!

"Just at the point in my life where I was opening to a world beyond pop, aged 13, 14, 15, I heard this. Blind organist plays bass runs with his feet while his hands mend a flying-saucer engine."

PINK FLOYD

SEE EMILY PLAY

"The opening few bars are worth the price of admission alone. Soaring, echoing, reverberated Zippo-played bottleneck Telecaster, clashing with clouds of stellar Egyptian-esque Farfisa organ. If this is psychedelia, give me more."

PATTO

MONEY BAG

"Just when I thought I'd mastered 'blues guitar', along came Patto's Peter 'Ollie' Halsall and made me start again. There are more ideas in this heaven-scraping solo than nearly all of the world's guitarists manage in their entire lives. Inspirational."

SONNY ROLLINS

EAST BROADWAY RUN DOWN

"This took my head off. It's calm, it's major-scale melodic, it's got a triangular-sounding riff, but the sense of space is epic. You can put your head inside the holes and breathe deep."

CAPTAIN BEEFHEART & HIS MAGIC BAND

TROUT MASK REPLICA

"This whole album sounded like it had fallen through a hole in the time/space fabric, from the future. We still haven't caught up with it yet."

NEW YORK DOLLS

JET BOY

"I loved American comics, it was a real addiction. This stomping slice of primary colours was DC and Marvel brought to life. Like Jack Kirby had written and drawn a pop song. So much energy and zap!"

THE ROLLING STONES

CITADEL

"Borrowed from my mate Brian's older brother, who beat him up as he didn't ask his permission, here's my favourite Stones track from my favourite Stones album. A future-dystopian, psychedelic, raw riff."

THE KINKS

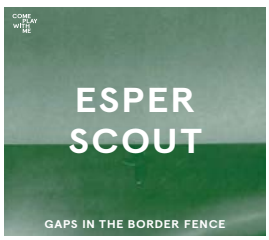
AUTUMN ALMANAC

"I've spent all of XTC's career chasing the rickety rotten-wood glory of this song. It twists and turns like a Victorian rollercoaster made of driftwood and conkers. So sublime is it, that I kneel before uncle Ray for this alone."

THE BEATLES

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

"For its opening chord alone. A sharp splinter of broken record-shop window that stabs Queen Victoria in the back and announces: 'The 20th century starts NOW!'" ●



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Simon says

SIMON RAYMONDE

Bella Union's founder feels that incessant, rude chatter at gigs and concerts is symptomatic of a wider social issue – and says the talking must stop

There is more than a general air of malaise hovering above us – indeed, we are wholly engulfed in a seemingly terminal thick black cloud of it at the moment. And I freely admit that I am wavering.

55 is an interesting age to be, and of course, like most people of that vintage, I feel 20 years younger than that in my head. But having lived through Thatcher (not sure why, but I always think of Bob Carolgees and Spit The Dog whenever I think of THAT woman), then having been hypnotised and hoodwinked by the pseudo-socialist Voldemort Tony Blair, it's clear to these failing eyes that we have gone backwards as a nation and as a planet – and that we are now paying for a lesson we still haven't learnt.

In government, as in music, we elevate the mediocre to pass as genius; and the truly exceptional minds are regarded as dangerous, subversive and superfluous. The whole concept of society, as defined by our 'elected representatives', is based on lies, corruption and deceit. And we all go blindly along with it, because we are so busy paying the rent and raising the kids that we are literally too tired to even hold up a wavering hand in protest.

Being involved in music can be both blessing and curse. Diversions and distractions amidst downright denial are some of the creative tools of the musical mind. Burrowing deep into the ground and creating music, poetry, paintings and literature, some of us can drop below the surface and isolate ourselves from the agony of acceptance of our plight. When great art comes out of this, it's time well spent. When nothing comes, however, it feels like a dereliction of duty. This anxiety is not andropausal; not brought on by advancing middle age, nor is this distaste reserved solely for governments, institutions and barely elected heads of state.

Even at a celebration of music, in congregation with others at a gig – and, let's face it, half of my life is spent thus – my enjoyment is often diluted by audience members who feel it both necessary and acceptable to talk loudly during the performance. Were it only during the loud passages, it would perhaps be more forgivable. But when the performer is solo, or the band have ambient or delicate breaks, the monumental disrespect and disregard for the artist AND the rest of us that some people show, night after night, is depressing. This is not a new problem, but to me, it seems worse than ever. I used to tolerate it in irate silence, but now have no hesitation in confronting the incessant perpetrators – one of the few unexpected delights of middle age is being able to say exactly what you think, without worrying about the response.

> ***The signs at the Luminaire read: 'No one here paid to listen to you talking to your pals. If you want to talk to your pals when the bands are on, please leave the venue'***

The extraordinary Jambinai played a blistering set in Totnes at Sea Change festival in late August this year (quite how anyone would want to be talking, let alone scratching, thinking or even breathing during one of the gigs of the year is beyond me) and yet a couple halfway back just couldn't shut up.

I walked up to the 'gentleman' and whispered to him: "I have no interest in your penis size, but if you don't stop talking, I am going to enlarge your nut sack by 200%. The band did not come 5,700 miles to listen to your woefully uninteresting life story." I walked back down the front and closed my eyes, as the music resumed casting its spell over me.

I regularly mourn the closing of the Luminaire club in Kilburn, London, run by Andy Inglis – where talking during the shows was forbidden. Signs hung on all walls with the following admonition: 'No one here paid to listen to you talking to your pals. If you want to talk to your pals when the bands are on, please leave the venue'.

This was no idle threat. I have a CD recording of Midlake's headline show there back in 2006, with support from Fionn Regan, and there's a moment during his set where the talking becomes noticeable. Firstly, you hear a few "Sssshhhhh!"s and then it goes quiet; then after the next song, when the murmur starts and the chatter returns, you can hear: "Will you just fucking SHUT UP!" (Listening back, I am now certain that is my voice).

With the state our planet is in, I realise this is hardly of pressing concern, but it's just one tiny fragment of a whole wider disintegration of values. The irony is that, at a time when talking is needed, we fall silent and when we need silence, we can't keep quiet. ●

SIMON RAYMONDE *was the bassist and keyboard player in Cocteau Twins and founded the independent record label Bella Union*

The Story Behind The Sleeve

#6 Island Life

Grace Jones

The seemingly physics-defying feat of athleticism on the cover of Grace Jones' 1985 compilation album *Island Life* was in fact a work of pre-Photoshop trickery. French art director and Jones' then-partner Jean-Paul Goude used a series of clear boxes to hold Jones' muscular limbs in an Arabesque ballet position and amalgamated several different shots. "Unless you are extraordinarily supple, you cannot do this Arabesque," said Goude. "The main point is that Grace couldn't do it, and that's the basis of my entire work: creating a credible illusion." Illusion or not, Goude's work has inspired several imitators, with Kylie Minogue's *Fever* album sleeve and the video to Nicki Minaj's 2011 single *Stupid Hoe* paying homage to the pose. Released on Island Records, the album is a collection of highlights from 1977 to 1985, including *I Need A Man*, *Do Or Die*, *Pull Up To The Bumper* and *Slave To The Rhythm*. It was followed up by the *Island Life 2* edition.

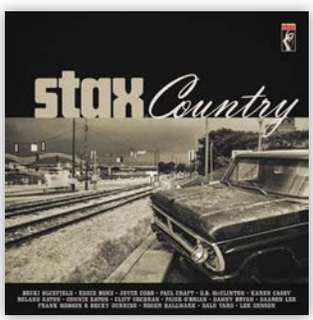
Now Spinning

The 14 essential tracks on *Long Live Vinyl*'s turntable this month – plus this issue's companion beer, Soundwave, a deliciously hoppy West Coast IPA with zesty grapefruit, peach and mango flavours, from Berkshire brewer Siren.

1 Carin At The Liquor Store – The National (4AD)
2 Harder Rain – Hiss Golden Messenger (Merge)
3 Drive – R.E.M. (Warner Bros)
4 Wässer – Inoyama Land (Yen Records)
5 Lucky Fellow – Leroy Hutson (Acid Jazz)
6 No Ball Games – Basement 5 (PIAS)
7 The Boy With The Thorn In His Side – The Smiths (Rhino)
8 Sky Trails – David Crosby (BMG)
9 Wall Of Glass – Liam Gallagher (Warner Bros)
10 Have You Heard The News? – Talk Talk (Parlophone)
11 Walk – Philip Selway (Bella Union)
12 Josephine – Michael Head (Violette Records)
13 Anxa – Kelly Lee Owens (Smalltown Supersound)
14 Untotooku – Chiemi Manabe (CBS/Sony)

Country Stax

Stax might be synonymous with soul music, but it delved into country in its mid-70s twilight years. Cue a new vinyl compilation, *Stax Country*. The LP, out 20 October, gathers rarities by OB McClinton and Cliff Cochran from the label's archives (now controlled by Craft Recordings). "Although the majority of the songs never made it to the radio waves, let alone store shelves," Craft tell us, "the tracks collected on *Stax Country* stand as long-lost gems."



INDUSTRIAL RE-EVOLUTION

Industrial-music collectors, you are in luck. October sees new vinyl releases from Throbbing Gristle, Coil and Skinny Puppy, and Dais Records revisit Coil's 1997 four-part drone work *Time Machines* as a double-vinyl LP in standard black as well as limited-edition red, grey and clear variants. Mute Records starts a series of Throbbing Gristle reissues on 3 November with a 40th-anniversary edition of *The Second Annual Report* on white vinyl, *20 Jazz Funk Greats* on green and *The Taste Of TG* on double red. Canada's Skinny Puppy, meanwhile, revisit their *Remission* and *Bites* releases on 13 October, via Nettwerk.

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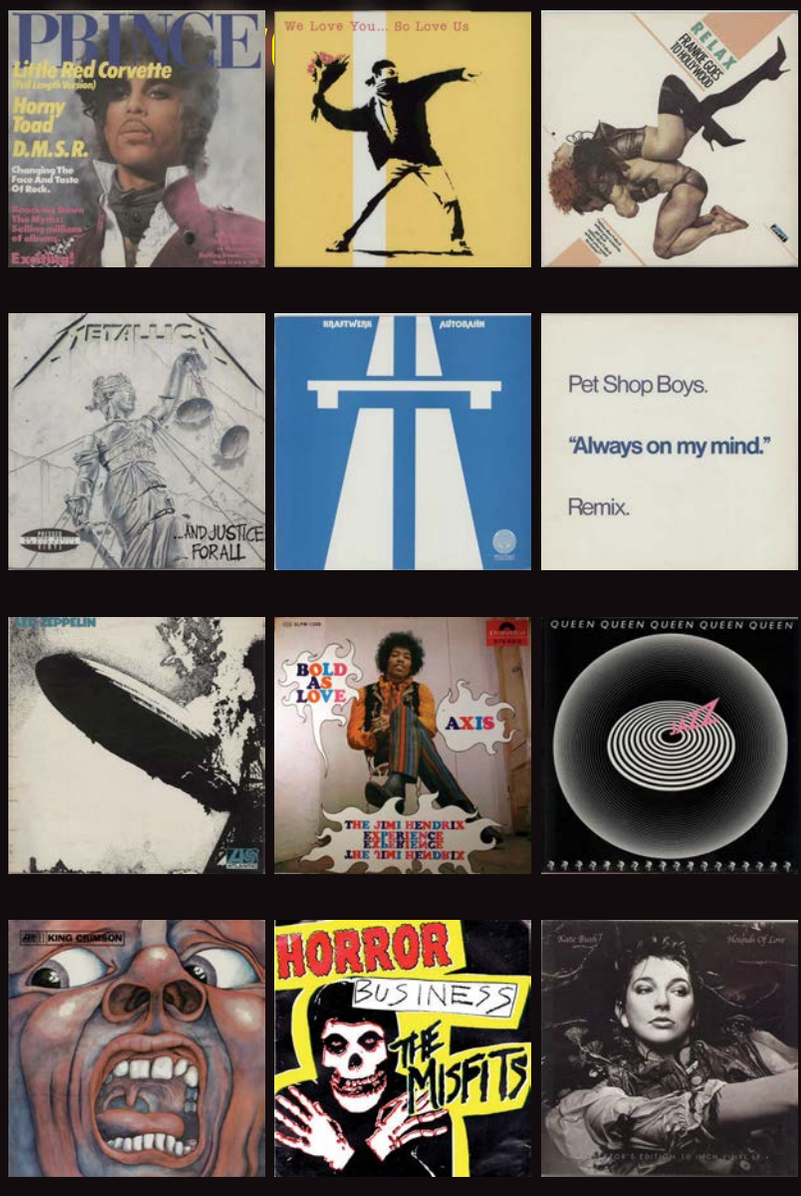

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On The Radar

L.A. WITCH

Long Live Vinyl catches up with the NY punk-rockers on tour in Germany

L.A. Witch were born when bass guitarist Irita Pai met Sade Sanchez through a mutual friend. The art-history grad had been jamming with some female friends and wanted someone who could sing and play guitar. After her original drummer moved to New York, Pai worked with a string of drummers until they found Ellie English. Sanchez and English already knew each other, as they had been in a two-piece band together since high school.

It wasn't long before they were spotted and signed. Pai says: "We played a show in Seattle at this really tiny dive bar. David from [Seattle label] Suicide Squeeze came out to see us, he was really cool and super-easy to hang out with and talk to. Afterwards, he got in touch with our friend/manager Andrew, and that was that. Being part of Suicide Squeeze is amazing, they really welcomed us into their family. Plus, The Coathangers are on their label and they are an amazing band."

The trio have since toured the world and finished a stint in the studio which saw them complete their self-titled debut album. "It's a collection of songs – some of which we had when we started the band," says Pai. "Songs such as *Brian* and *Untitled*, as well as new songs we worked on during our tours."

Pai is a fan of vinyl now, but dubs her parents 'cassette tape people'. She says: "I didn't really start listening to vinyl until I got my first record player in high school, and I would buy records from thrift shops for super-cheap.

"I love the way vinyl sounds, it's got a really warm quality. Like the difference between an analogue and a digital photograph."

Asked about the band's name – conuring up a dark, gothic sound rather than the punky, rockier music they actually make – Pai concedes it can cause confusion: "People do think that we are real witches who practise Wicca, which isn't true. When we first started the band, we were just really drawn to the word 'witch' because we all had dark hair, and it was a really powerful and feminine word."

L.A. Witch's eponymous debut album is out now. For more details go to lawitches.bandcamp.com ●

DAVID BOWIE

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Björk's Gate

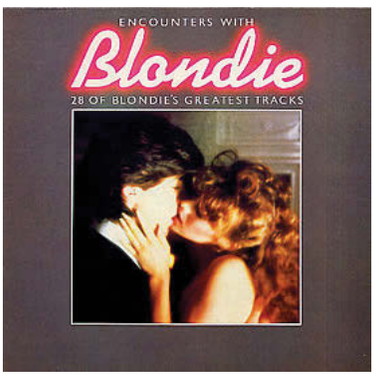
Björk trails the release of her ninth album with *The Gate*, a limited-edition one-sided 12" on One Little Indian, the video for which was unveiled at London Fashion Week. The new album will be available on both standard vinyl and a Luxury Edition (the details of which are yet to be announced) – and the 22-track set is about "rediscovering love", the singer reports, "but in a spiritual way, for lack of a better word…"

NEXT-GEN VINYL

IFPI is a not-for-profit organisation which represents the interests of record companies worldwide, and its recent report on trends in Music Consumption among internet users across the globe makes heartening reading for vinyl lovers. The report found that over the last six months, 44% of music consumers are buying physical copies or paid downloads of music – and 17% of these are buying vinyl (32% CD, 28% downloads). Among the next generation of music listeners (aged 13 to 15 years), the figure rises to 19% buying vinyl (37% CDs, 38% downloads). To download the report, visit: http://ifpi.org/downloads/Music-Consumer-Insight-Report-2017.pdf

YOUR MOST VALUABLE VINYL

Our friends at 991.com trawl through the crates and bring us four more prized collectables. All values are for mint or near-mint condition copies



ENCOUNTERS WITH

BLONDIE

1983 UK 28-track double-vinyl LP on Air Records, in a unique gatefold picture sleeve with a great Debbie Harry image on the inner spread and discography pics on the reverse, catalogue number CDMR1. This album was withdrawn from release and fetches £100 in mint condition.

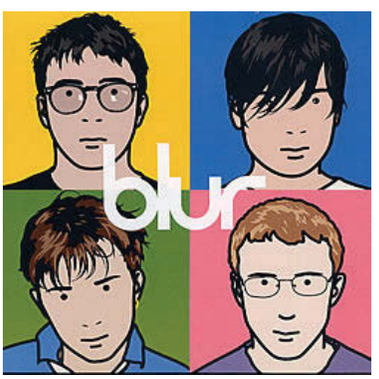
Value **£100**

R.E.M.

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

Classic 1992 UK 12-track vinyl LP, pressed in Germany for the UK market, complete with illustrated lyric inner and picture sleeve, WX488. Near-new examples, not as common as you might expect, are fetching around £25.

Value **£25**

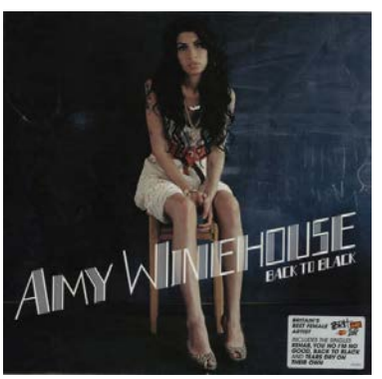


BLUR

THE BEST OF

2000 UK limited edition 18-track double LP, gatefold picture sleeve with picture inners, complete with the artist-name-printed PVC outer, FOODLPD33. The outer sleeve is what makes this more interesting and desirable, fetching around the £75 mark in top condition.

Value **£75**



AMY WINEHOUSE

BACK TO BLACK

2007 UK first pressing 11-track LP on heavyweight vinyl, including the singles *Rehab* and *Back To Black*, housed in the 'Brits Award' hype stickered picture sleeve complete with picture/lyric inner. Mint originals are now fetching around £65.

Value **£65**

IAN PEEL'S
LINER NOTES

Prepare to be shocked – once again – as *Long Live Vinyl*'s editor-at-large revisits our most contentious feature to date, Issue 5's exploration of banned sleeves. We've discovered more of the good, the bad and the plain ugly…

Despite our front cover for Issue 5 coming censored safely inside a brown paper bag, that issue's cover feature on banned artwork could have be renamed 'The *Long Live Vinyl* Feature They Tried to Ban'! Did you spot the 'Censored' sticker we had to add over the Pet Shop Boys' phallic *The Truck Driver And His Mate*?

We've had letters and emails – a few from shocked readers, but most from vinyl-heads pointing out sleeve art that we didn't include. We've also thought of a few more sleeves, since we went to press, that definitely should have been given a mention.

Firstly, a note from reader Carl Jacobs in Nottingham: "Feel compelled to email you re: your good article," he writes. "But must protest… the Scorpions' *Lovedrive* was included, but not the original sleeves for *Taken By Force* or *Animal Magnetism*, OR the original *Virgin Killer*?"

Indeed. While we included Hipgnosis' 'surreal groping' on 1979's *Lovedrive*, we passed on the rest of Scorpions' taste-defying artwork. The feature was all about curating a selection of sleeves, after all, as opposed to compiling an extensive library list of banned art. As we mentioned in the intro: "There have been many sleeves over the years that have set out to shock, been designed in very poor taste or been simply a 'product of their times'. None of those are included here." And you can safely say that all of those other Scorps covers tick all three of those boxes.

We featured The Stones' 'Beggars Banquet' album from 1968, but overlooked, we've realised, their 'Street Fighting Man' single

Carl's other suggestions, though, all warrant a definite tip of the cap, and would've been great to include, space permitting. Like the Iron Maiden non-album single from 1980 where Eddie is caught red-handed, despatching Margaret Thatcher. "No original sleeve for *Sanctuary* single by Iron Maiden, with the non-expurgated or redacted face of a certain 80s Prime Minister?"

A couple of additions of my own. We featured The Rolling Stones' *Beggars Banquet* album from 1968, but overlooked, we've since realised, their *Street Fighting Man* single, released the same year. "The Stones' picture sleeve used two images depicting police brutality taken from one of the many riots that had broken out in over 100 US cities that year," Bonhams explained, when they auctioned a copy – for $17,000! – in 2011. "The record company deemed the sleeve to be inappropriate and it was immediately withdrawn. No one knows for sure how many examples of this sleeve have survived, but most estimate the number to be between 10 and 18 copies, placing it among the rarest pieces of Rolling Stones memorabilia."

Our final addition comes from Carl Jacobs again, with what must be the only sleeve ever to have been banned for health-and-safety reasons. It's Hawkwind's ninth album, *PXR5*, released on Charisma in 1979. Why? The very arty electrical plugs illustrated on the front and back just happen to have been wired incorrectly. ●

STUDIO SNAPSHOT

BLONDIE

Record Plant, NYC, 1978

In this shot, taken in summer 1978 during the recording of Blondie's *Parallel Lines* at NYC's Record Plant Studios, Debbie Harry sarcastically checks the pulse and mops the brow of producer Mike Chapman. By this point, the band had achieved major success with *Denis*, a reworked cover of a 1963 Randy & The Rainbows hit, but the vital and trashy retro-pop-meets-punk sound of their first two albums lacked polish.

Chapman, together with parter Nicky Chinn, was already a phenomenally successful songwriter during the 70s, and as producer, he came to the *Parallel Lines* project with some very definite ideas about the direction Blondie should take, wanting to foreground the strand of songwriting nous he'd detected beyond Harry's sultry, badass allure and the band's CBGB-scenester cool.

Tensions between the insouciant New Yorkers and the obsessive taskmaster were understandably high. Chapman recalled working on gelling the band together as a musical unit; he also persuaded Harry to be more emotional with her delivery and connect more with the audience. Of the process, he remembered: "We went into the studio to make *Parallel Lines* and they didn't know what hit 'em."

Guitarist Chris Stein confirmed: "When we finally got to Mike Chapman, it was like, school's out – nobody was ready for it. He whipped us into shape… To me, the genius of Chapman was that [the album] sounds so spontaneous, and it wasn't – at all."

Chapman became increasingly involved in the arrangements and, despite his exacting regime, *Parallel Lines* was full of moments of great musical creativity. It went on to sell well over 20 million copies, reaching No. 6 in the US and No. 1 in the UK. Harry's iconic, stylised presence ("Cold as ice cream but still as sweet") and the band's blend of fractious punk energy and songwriting savvy were perfectly realised on *Parallel Lines* and its 12 lean, economical cuts secured the band's rock 'n' roll immortality. For Chapman, the album – along with The Knack's hugely successful debut *Get The Knack* – was a career high, too; proving that sometimes, a little creative tension in the studio can be a positive thing.

RECORD STORE DAY SUMMER CAMP

RSD SUMMER CAMP
AUGUST 21-25 » 2017 « NEW ORLEANS

Larry Jaffee travels to America's Crescent City, New Orleans, to join record-shop owners, labels and vinyl fanatics from across the globe at the second annual Record Store Day Summer Camp...

Few people would dispute that Record Store Day has served as a catalyst for the vinyl format's astounding comeback over the past decade – after all, the event is celebrated on every continent except Antarctica. And now its success has been bolstered by a new event – Record Store Day Summer Camp.

Descending on New Orleans' famed Hotel Monteleone, RSD delegates from across the States, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Australia and Japan rubbed shoulders with 310 indie record-store owners, indie labels, major distributors and 170 speciality retailers. These numbers ensured that the event eclipsed last year's inaugural Camp, held in Baltimore.

"Summer Camp is a melding of the minds of some of the best indie record stores in the country," says Terry Currier, owner of Boise, Idaho-based Music Millennium, and part of the RSD brain trust. "We are all alive and well because of the sharing of information with each other, which gives us the ability to make our stores even better."

In a nutshell, the five-day camp is a B2B convention, where labels and distributors network in person with indie record stores to figure out what promotions work, tweak online ordering systems, publicise releases in the pipeline and then venture out into the humid weather to hear some live music in the city's boisterous French Quarter clubs. Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys kicked off the live-music proceedings on Monday night, backed by hometown heroes the Preservation Hall Jazz Band in their landmark club. A showcase later in the week at the House Of Blues featured performances by artists including Ani DiFranco, John Waite and others.

In between, merchants traded tips on how to 'deputise' consumers with in-store promotions and how to thrive in their communities, while Thursday afternoon's Trade Show gave Campers the chance to grab as much promo vinyl and swag as their luggage could hold from several-dozen exhibitors.

During a lively audience discourse – orbiting around indie retailers' obvious pent-up frustration about not getting the respect they deserve from the industry – a store veteran bellowed from the back of the large ballroom: "We need to take back our industry… Some of us have been doing this for 40-plus years."

Michael Kurtz, RSD's co-founder and main spokesman, sitting among the audience, confirmed he sympathises. Every time a store customer finds out that he or she can't buy a coveted record, whether or not it's an RSD release for whatever reason, the cumulative harm, according to Kurtz, "is death by a thousand cuts", risking the loss of a loyal patron and further disenfranchising RSD affiliates.

"The indies can now make the difference in whether or not a record makes it to No. 1 on the charts," Kurtz explained later, when *Long Live Vinyl* sat down with him.

The vast majority of vinyl records are not released 'day and date' simultaneously with CDs and digital, and it's hoped that the new pressing plants popping up around the world might loosen the logjam, thereby reducing vinyl back orders all along the supply chain.

WEA vice president Billy Fields, Warner's affable 'vinyl guy', was also among the audience, and admitted to experiencing

Above right, Dan Auerbach entertaining the Campers. Below, Darryl McDaniels delivering his keynote speech

THE LIST OF OFFICIAL RSD RELEASES IS SO SECRET, IT'S NOT EVEN UNVEILED AT SUMMER CAMP

TALK THIS WAY

Record Store Day releases usually aren't divulged until a month before. An exception at RSD Summer Camp was an announcement from indie label Brookvale Records' owner Karl Groeger Jr, who also owns West Babylon, New York's Looney Tunes. Last April, Brookvale reissued Peter Tosh's *Legalize It* for RSD, among the 70 records he's licensed over the past 10 years, including the Grateful Dead Dick's Picks live-concert series.

Groeger revealed that this Black Friday, he's releasing *The London Chuck Berry Sessions* and *Back From The Dead*, a 12-inch EP and preview of the forthcoming comeback album from hip-hop pioneer Darryl McDaniels of RUN-D.M.C. McDaniels' unforgettable keynote address told of him growing up "a nerdy little weird kid who loved school and always made the honour roll, liked to read comic books and wore glasses because I wanted to see."

Darryl (DMC) couldn't relate to his teenage peers who trash-talked about their latest street fight or which girls they fancied. He preferred the latest Elton John hit he'd heard on Top 40 AM radio to the emerging Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five. Catholic high-school classmate Joseph Simmons (younger brother of future mogul Russell) recruited him to write lyrics. A few years after RUN-D.M.C. made it big, McDaniels said when they ran into Steven Tyler and Joe Perry in the studio in 1987 while recording a cover of Aerosmith's *Walk This Way*, the rap trio thought the classic-rock duo were from The Rolling Stones.

occasional problems. "We're not perfect. We do something good, and then we fuck up. You guys aren't perfect either," he noted, urging the disgruntled to not lose sight of the fact that both small, independent shops and major labels are "passionate and vital to the future of the music business".

Indie stores' biggest competition, Kurtz believes, is not from Amazon, but 'D2C' – the major labels and artists selling 'direct to consumer'. "[Labels and bands] that understand this are more accommodating [in considering indie retail needs]," he said, adding that it's not malice, but rather poor communication, that's at fault.

With the next US Black Friday date of November 24 looming, the list of official RSD releases is a secret so closely guarded it's not even unveiled at Summer Camp. Instead, throughout the year, an RSD committee sifts through about 1,000 LP, EP and 45 proposals for reissues, of which around half are approved.

Elsewhere, at the Town Hall, attendees complained about unethical eBay resellers taking pre-orders at $99 for limited-edition titles months before they're released.

Another touchy topic striking a nerve with indie retailers was the US moving new release day from Tuesday to Friday, three years ago, to be in sync with the rest of the world.

On the plus side, it was reported that every week, RSD hears about a new independent store opening, adding to an estimated 1,500 in the US and a similar number elsewhere in the world.

"We've released over 4,000 unique RSD releases, at an average quantity of 3,000 – that's 12 million vinyl records," Kurtz said. "If there are 100,000 unsold RSD titles, that is less than 1%. Every year, we get better and better at managing production, and the sell-through on RSD releases in 2017 was the best yet."

Kurtz and fellow RSD co-founder Carrie Colliton are the only people working year-round on RSD in the US. Surveying the large room during her speech, Colliton mentioned how pleased she was to see more women present at the event than the previous year. Lisa Foster, who left behind academia to run Guestroom Records in Louisville, Kentucky, then continued the theme by focusing on the subject of gender injustice and how sexism in society also permeates record stores. Since record stores' social media is often, perhaps stereotypically, handled by female employees, Foster urges owners to not "make fun of selfies, especially with your store logo in the background. [Women are] taking pride in your store." ●

Photography Alison Zak-Collins at Resolution Records, Bath

1990 TO 2007

VINYL'S LOST YEARS

Vinyl may have hit its lowest ebb in the 1990s and 2000s, but it was still being pressed, and there are some highly valuable treasures to be found. So, where do you start? **Ben Wardle** asks a range of experts for their thoughts...

"Between 2006 and 2011, I was living in Japan, teaching English for a living but digging for records in my spare time – in record shops of course, but also temple markets, junk shops and record fairs. I'm mainly a jazz fan, but on my travels I was astounded by how cheap 90s and 2000s alt-rock was – knowing the crazy prices these records were selling for online, I couldn't resist picking up a pile of clean, sometimes sealed copies of LPs by Oasis, Pearl Jam, PJ Harvey and Beck, all for between 1,200 and 2,000 yen (£7 to £14). Because I was teaching, I developed a peculiar rationale of looking at my hourly teaching rate in terms of the resale value of these rare LPs – I felt like I was being paid in Britpop and alt-rock!"

I'm sitting in a pub across a table from Sean Roe, now proprietor of JunKroom Records. We're looking at a catalogue from Japanese new-and-used music chain store Disk Union. The booklet is an alphabetical list, showing what the shop is prepared to offer owners for original copies of classic albums. But we're not talking *In The Court Of The Crimson King* or *Sticky Fingers*; everything featured in this brochure was released between 1989 and 2010 and pretty much everything is a single genre: indie, or alt-rock if you prefer. A quick browse reveals that Disk Union will pay ¥15,000 (£100) for your original copy of Pearl Jam's *Lost Dogs*; the same money for Belle And Sebastian's *Tigermilk*; ¥3,000 (£30) for The Divine Comedy's *Casanova* and ¥7,500 (£50) for Keane's *Hopes And Fears*.

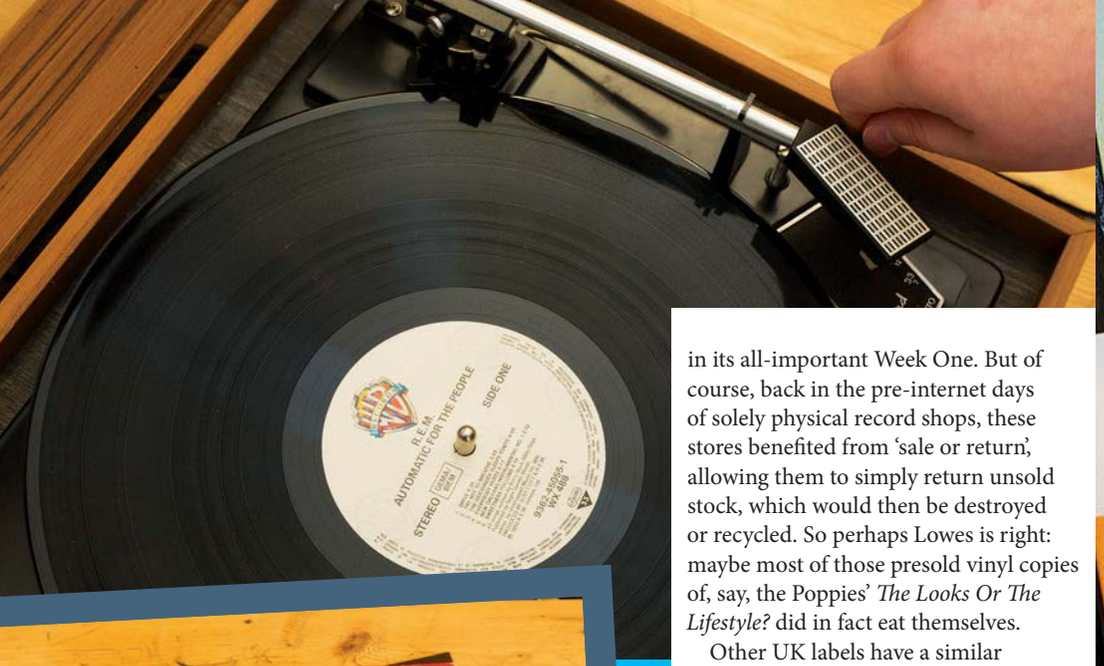
However, if you're looking for any of these, don't get too excited, says Sean: "Remember, this brochure was published the last time I was in Tokyo in 2014. If Disk Union was offering that for them then, they'll be offering way more now. The prices in Tokyo are now pretty much in line with what you'll pay here in the UK. Values are accelerating everywhere."

ABANDONED FORMAT

Sean's right. Cursory glances at go-to used vinyl site Discogs, or vinyl sales aggregator Popsike, reveal that prices have rocketed: the same 2003 Pearl Jam compilation now regularly fetches over £200, The Divine Comedy's breakthrough album costs north of £70, while Keane's debut now sells for a staggering £160.

Welcome to the world of 90s and noughties vinyl: vinyl's lost decades. These were the years when alt-rock and indie bands conquered the mainstream, while vinyl increasingly took the backseat. Then all but died. BPI sales figures for this period tell a sorry tale: by 1999, vinyl was clinging onto a pitiful 0.6% market share of overall UK album sales with just under 700,000 sales. But eight years later, in 2007, the format had reached its nadir with a microscopic 0.1% share and just over 205,000 sales. Record buyers were simply not interested in it and, of course, most record labels had already given up making it.

It was, as with so many things, the US which led the market. By the mid-90s, most US major record labels had abandoned vinyl completely. Former Sub Pop executive



and self-proclaimed vinyl junkie Jason Reynolds remembers when the tide turned for indie labels in the US: "All the big US indies like Touch And Go, Matador and Merge stayed in the vinyl business long after the majors left it. The turning point was 1998. Up until then, we had released all albums on LP at Sub Pop. Then suddenly, a lot of titles dropped the format. There were albums by Pernice Brothers and Damien Jurado, which, in hindsight, were made to be listened to on vinyl. We got to the test-pressing stage and never went further. By this point, everyone had shifted to CDs. It was only Europe doing vinyl."

Over in the UK, Steve Lowes was a product manager for RCA/BMG, marketing artists from The Wedding Present to Wu-Tang Clan. They were still manufacturing vinyl, but how much of it? "Vinyl numbers were odd. We did 'limited editions' of 5,000 for artists like Pop Will Eat Itself or Spiritualized, which we could easily do on presale. But now I think about it, I wonder how many actually sold?"

The 'presale' of any release is a really important number, which is used to gauge how many an album will sell in its all-important Week One. But of course, back in the pre-internet days of solely physical record shops, these stores benefited from 'sale or return', allowing them to simply return unsold stock, which would then be destroyed or recycled. So perhaps Lowes is right: maybe most of those presold vinyl copies of, say, the Poppies' *The Looks Or The Lifestyle?* did in fact eat themselves.

Other UK labels have a similar story. The Cure, The Verve, Cast, Shed Seven, Gene and Smashing Pumpkins all shared a marketing manager in the 1990s called William Higham. Now founder of futurist consultancy Next Big Thing, back then, Higham oversaw rock campaigns for Virgin and Polydor.

"I don't recall exactly how many vinyl albums we used to manufacture back then, but as a format, it was pretty much over. It was as much about artists just wanting to see themselves on vinyl as it was about actual sales. Bands had grown up cherishing their favourite artists' albums on vinyl, so it was important for them to have their own album on the same format."

Indeed, artists in the 90s and 00s were probably the last generation to have grown up with records. It would be interesting to find out how today's indie representatives, such as Ed Sheeran or The 1975, feel about the format, which they'd more likely associate with their parents and grandparents.

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT

Higham paints a benign picture of record companies back then, with marketing managers trying to do right by idealistic artists who may not have had their own best business interests at heart: "Vinyl had a credibility to it. Bands would often spend more time talking to me about the artwork for their vinyl than they would about any other format, and sometimes, the amount we'd spend on it was more than we'd get back from sales. Very often, we'd have to fight with the guys in finance to get a vinyl version approved."

The vision of Higham, flanked by a determined Richard Ashcroft or a defiant drummer from Gene, storming into the record-company boardroom and pounding a fist on the table in the name of vinyl, somehow represents everything magical that has been lost from the record business since downloading and streaming took over.

And from today's perspective, it doesn't seem so insane that these artists should have wanted their work released on a big shiny 12" disc in a spot-varnished cardboard sleeve. As evidence of a piece of creative work, it's significantly more emblematic than a pocket-sized shaving mirror.

Nowadays, with so few of these emblems left, what does it mean for fans and collectors?

Vinyl copies of *Different Class* by Pulp (pictured here in 1998) are über rare

Getty

There are rich pickings in the 90s and 2000s sections, even if the records in question were huge sellers on CD

"It's crazy how much the old 90s vinyl goes for now – it's purely down to scarcity," says Jason. "I foolishly never bought Spiritualized's *Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space* on vinyl at the time, figuring my withdrawn advance CD with the Elvis lyric was cool enough. I had ample opportunity and it's truly one of my favourite records. Thankfully, I was patient and waited and didn't have to pay the $150 it regularly sells for – but still ended up buying it on eBay for a hell of a lot more than I would have at the time. And don't get me started on records I worked on!"

Sean's business was originally based largely on his healthy stock of 90s and 2000s original releases, purchased during his time in Japan. But things have changed in the last year: "I've sold so much of my 90s stock now, I'm down to about two boxes…"

Glen Bushell, a buyer at used vinyl online megastore eil.com, agrees: "We're lucky if we get one or two serious 90s/2000s collections a month. I think people are wanting to hang on to them due to their collectability, or trying to sell them privately."

Simon Vincent, who runs Trading Post in Stroud, Gloucestershire, selling predominantly second-hand vinyl, is also running low on stock. "I'm seeing less vinyl from the 90s, which is a relatively recent phenomenon. There are more collectors coming on board every year and, obviously, you can't make more original pressings. So once all the people that want to get rid of them have sold them, there's a much slower process of more copies coming on to the market. So prices are going up."

"WE'RE LUCKY IF WE GET ONE OR TWO SERIOUS 90S/2000S COLLECTIONS A MONTH"

UNCOMMON, PEOPLE

It's becoming clear that fans and collectors are now seeking out the years of grunge, Britpop, art rock and trip-hop because not only did this period see the release of so many highly regarded albums, but also because most copies were bought on CD. So while a silver 5" disc of *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?* is a charity-shop regular, an original Creation double-vinyl version will now set you back just short of £150.

"The most expensive ones are the first two Oasis albums," says Simon. "Pulp's *Different Class*, too. Last time I sold an original of that was about seven years ago and it was a slightly damaged copy, but it still went for £70. Mansun's *Attack Of The Grey Lantern* is really collectible too. I love that album!"

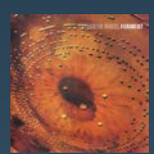
I find a copy of Mansun's debut for £60 in Forest Vinyl, a second-hand vinyl business based in Cinderford, deep in the Forest of Dean. In the centre of the shop, surrounded by towers of tempting boxes of classics, is a single box marked Rare Records, which houses LPs almost exclusively from the 90s to 2000s period. Prices range from £40 for Björk's

20 CLASSICS FROM THE TIME THAT VINYL FORGOT

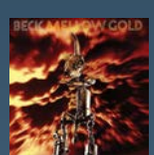
Moby
Play
(Mute 1999)
Discogs £70
Mute put this out on double vinyl with lovely attention to detail on the labels, which match up with the images on the inner sleeves. Despite a 2016 reissue, an original is still worth about £70.

Longpigs
The Sun Is Often Out
(Mother/Polydor 1997)
Discogs £110
Look past Longpigs' superficial four-blokes-playing-guitars image and you'll discover hugely addictive tunes (*On And On*, *Far*, *Jesus Christ*). Not many exist on vinyl, so be prepared to find over £100 if you want one.

Queens Of The Stone Age *Songs For The Deaf*
(Interscope 2002)
Discogs £180
Not only did this come out as a double-vinyl edition in the UK, but there was a red-vinyl release the following year, on Ipecac Recordings in the US. Either will cost you £180.



Catherine Wheel
Ferment
(Fontana 1992)
Discogs £120
Fronted by Bruce Dickinson's cousin Rob, you might be surprised that Catherine Wheel were, initially, shoegaze-y indie rock. *Ferment* was re-released this year, but an original will still set you back £100.



Beck
Mellow Gold
(Bong Load 1994)
Discogs £60
Mellow Gold was originally released in a form that was swiftly withdrawn. This first version has 'the mother load' scratched into the runout groove and contains a version of the song *Pay No Mind (Snoozer)* with an extra verse. Fans wanting this version will have to shell out about £60.

Getty

The popularity of breakbeat artists such as Fatboy Slim ensured more of their LPs appeared on vinyl

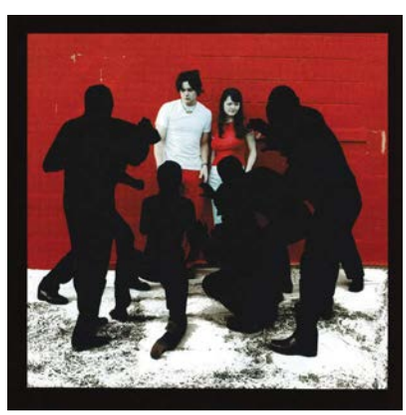
Homogenic, to £250 for Muse's debut *Showbiz* on clear vinyl. The period is now so popular that even albums by relatively uncelebrated bands from the era are sought after.

Sitting behind his expansive desk with a copy of this very magazine loyally on display behind him, storeowner Steve Helsdown tells me: "*Late Of The Pier*'s album [*Fantasy Black Channel*, 2008] goes for £150 to £170. It's actually a great record – I love it. There are only three available on Discogs and none of them are in this country, which proves to me that it's incredibly hard to get hold of. Parlophone probably had bigger fish to fry and someone there probably thought: 'Let's just do 500.'"

GREAT WHITE WHALES

Of course, as with all record collecting, scarcity creates value. Keane's debut album is hugely sought after on vinyl, despite their massive CD sales, due to the very low number produced. With Coldplay, it's a different story, however. "Coldplay albums were all released on vinyl at the time," continues Steve, "and none of them are massively valuable, because they all sold quite well."

In the US, it's a similar story: "Of course, there are LPs from the 90s that



VINYL'S MARKET SHARE

The percentage of UK album sales on vinyl, 1995 to 2014

YEAR	TOTAL ALBUM SALES	LP SALES	LP SHARE
1995	89,455,539	1,410,905	1.6%
1996	103,266,184	1,083,206	1%
1997	109,325,350	817,018	0.7%
1998	121,452,691	642,102	0.5%
1999	121,525,694	672,866	0.6%
2000	134,264,460	751,857	0.6%
2001	144,910,939	761,558	0.5%
2002	149,178,636	657,127	0.4%
2003	159,277,737	579,248	0.4%
2004	163,405,653	453,254	0.3%
2005	158,988,943	351,224	0.2%
2006	154,742,547	250,926	0.2%
2007	138,065,149	205,292	0.1%
2008	133,643,773	208,526	0.2%
2009	128,946,805	219,449	0.2%
2010	119,906,678	234,471	0.2%
2011	113,186,129	337,041	0.3%
2012	100,484,979	388,768	0.4%
2013	94,015,935	780,674	0.83%
2014	86,839,621	1,288,510	1.5%

"So if you think back 20 years, they would have been listening to the music in their 20s; they're reliving their youth. And it's about buying something which you couldn't afford to buy at the time as well! I've even seen a slight decline in late-50s-to-mid-60s people coming in to buy classic rock."

Jason agrees: "Buyers are now in their 40s and 50s and have nostalgia towards those records, disposable income and they're rediscovering vinyl."

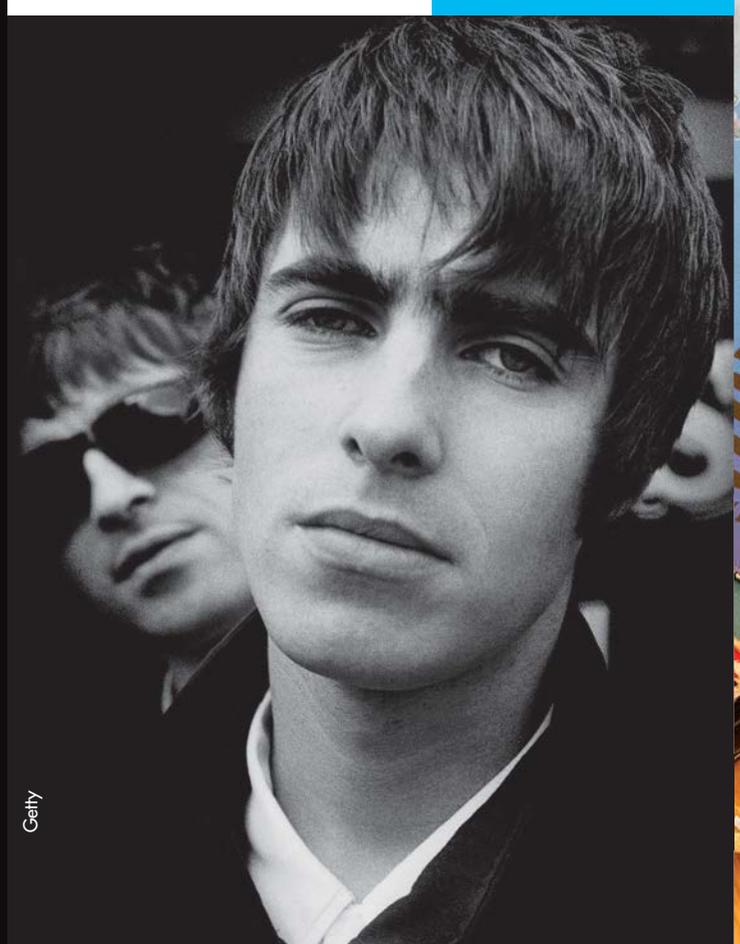
Sean adds: "Some customers will pull out, say, Elliott Smith's *XO* and say, ▶

are worth nothing," says Jason. "Some of which I put out! But seriously, My Bloody Valentine's *Loveless* has grown in stature so much over the years and there has never been an official 'source label' LP reissue, so originals are worth a mint. Both *Loveless* and *Isn't Anything* are white whales for a lot of people – and Sire never released either on LP in the US, so that's just added to it."

Glen at EIL agrees: "Personally, I would love to see a completely mint, unplayed, pristine copy of *Loveless*. Of course, the temptation to play it would be too great, as that is an album made specifically for vinyl. I own a wrecked copy, because I wanted it in my collection no matter what, and even that sounds good!"

What sort of customers are buying these albums? "Most of the people I've sold to are in their mid 40s," says Steve.

"I OWN A WRECKED COPY: I WANTED IT IN MY COLLECTION NO MATTER WHAT"



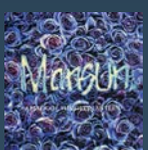
Getty

Oasis's debut on vinyl is worth in excess of £100

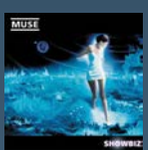
Pulp
Different Class
(Island 1995)
Discogs £100
Second Island outing for the Britpop Mercury Prize winners. It originally came in a frame-design sleeve with six double-sided interchangeable album cover cards and a sticker on the front saying 'Choose Your Own Front Cover'. Even damaged copies fetch good money.

Dido
No Angel
(Arista 2001)
Discogs £120
Dido's album came out on vinyl two years after the original release, after Eminem's ubiquitous sampling of *Thank You* put her on the map. It's one of the few albums from this period without so much as a nod towards indie, alt-rock or trip-hop.

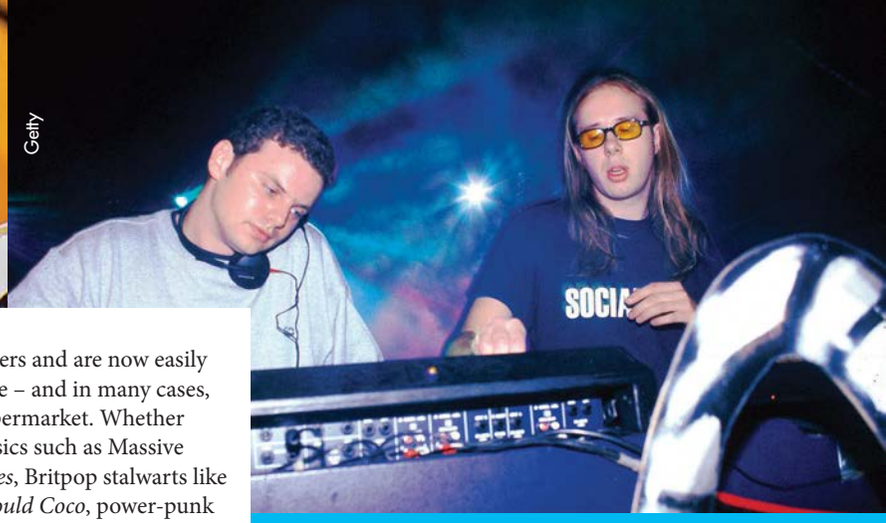
Keane
Hopes And Fears
(Island 2004)
Discogs £200
Very-limited-numbered edition of an album stuffed with expert pop tunes (*Somewhere Only We Know, Everybody's Changing*) sung emotively by Tom Chaplin. This may explain why the relatively uncelebrated Keane have a piece of vinyl which commands prices of up to £345. Follow-up *Under The Iron Sea* (with brilliant artwork) doesn't come cheap, either.



Mansun
Attack Of The Grey Lantern
(Parlophone 1997)
Discogs £60
Get yourself a copy and you can commiserate the wallet damage by remembering how great *She Makes My Nose Bleed* and *Wide Open Space* were. And make sure you get the free poster with it, too.



Muse
Showbiz
(Mushroom 1999)
Clear vinyl
Discogs £160
Muse have made better albums – particularly 2001 follow-up *Origin Of Symmetry* – but this one has the edge in physical format. It's pressed in beautiful clear vinyl with label and label copy all moulded into the plastic. Did you know Matt Bellamy's dad was in showbiz, too?


Getty

Artists such as The Chemical Brothers continued to release vinyl throughout the lean years

'Yay! I used to have this on CD, I love this album!' – you know, clearly fans. But others will buy £300-worth of stuff from me and they're obviously dealers, hoping to make a better margin selling online."

It's slightly dispiriting to imagine these albums getting whisked away by dealers and collectors, never to grace a turntable again. I ask Steve if he thinks this is the case: "We have lots of very regular customers," he says, "and because it's a small shop, we tend to chat. And the vast majority I speak to say: 'I can't wait to get this home and play it'. They're going to look after them, but they're going to play them. My regulars love music. They're not collectors, they're aficionados of music. There's a difference, I think."

Simon concurs: "For the most part, I think the majority of people buying original 90s and 00s vinyl are buying it to play – they might not play it very often, but they're buying it for the music."

Of course, since Record Store Day kickstarted the resurgence of interest in vinyl in the US and UK, record companies have jumped on the vinyl-reissue bandwagon. Indeed, in the last couple of years, many of the highly sought-after releases from this period have been re-released in seemingly unlimited numbers and are now easily obtainable online – and in many cases, in your local supermarket. Whether it's trip-hop classics such as Massive Attack's *Blue Lines*, Britpop stalwarts like Supergrass' *I Should Coco*, power-punk perennials such as Weezer's debut or the 2000s new wave of The White Stripes' *White Blood Cells*, they're all available again – in most cases, for less than £20. So why is it that fans want the originals, rather than the increasing number of much cheaper reissues?

ADRIFT ON MEMORY BLISS

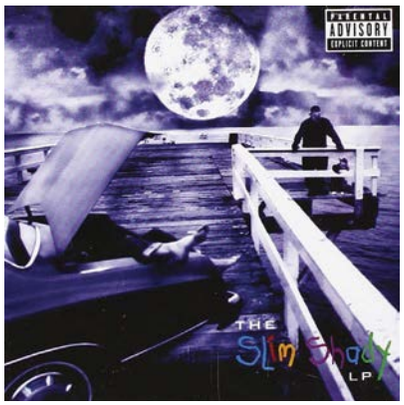
I start by asking Jason, who I hope, given that he's a collector and a record-label executive, might give me a measured answer. "Insanity?" he answers with a smile. I mention his comment to Steve Helsdown: "He has a point there. Why would you buy exactly the same thing for possibly five or 10 times more, when basically it's the same product with the same tracklisting and same cover?"

"If you asked 50 record collectors you'd get 10 or 20 different answers," says Simon. "The desirability of the original comes from the knowledge that a reissue wasn't around at the time of the original's release – the original was actually there in 1994, or whatever. I think the majority of people who are buying 90s vinyl are generally triggering a memory."

And are these reissues affecting the value of the originals? Sean has certainly experienced this: "You can't ever rely on a record's value simply going up," he says. "There are fluctuations all the time. Lots of the Beck albums have been reissued, for example, so the prices for an original tend to go down. The same thing has happened for the early Blur albums."

Steve disagrees, showing me an almost mint-condition original copy of Blur's 1997 self-titled album: "This would go for around £60 or £70. Everyone thinks a reissue would affect the price, but all it does is allow people who can't afford, or won't afford, a first issue to have the vinyl. The people who really want it and have the money don't go away."

"Re-releases don't affect sales any longer," says Simon. "There are so many reissues now, fans are used to being able to have the original at a certain price or a reissue at a certain price, so if anything, reissues are driving the desirability of the Holy Grail – the original."



Jason continues to ponder the appeal: "I think partially, you know that the original is all done the way it was meant to be. But in reality, there's an argument that there's better mastering technology now, so maybe a reissue could be thought to sound better."

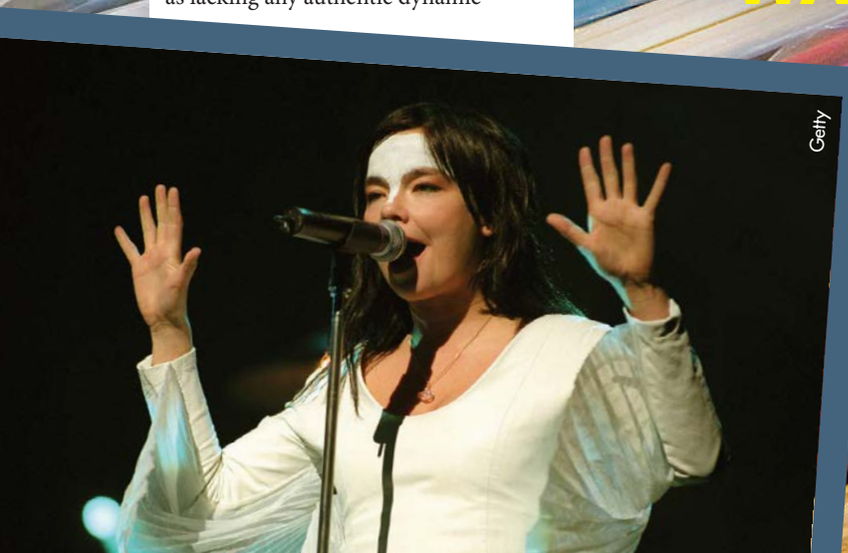
THE LOUDNESS WAR

"A lot of it doesn't make sense," muses Sean, "because most of these albums were recorded and mastered digitally, so having them on an analogue format is irrelevant. I can understand it with The White Stripes, maybe, who were recording everything on tape at Toe Rag Studios, but other artists… Having said that, some albums do sound better on the vinyl editions because of the mastering. There are certain CDs, like Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Californication* for example, that are often said to be poorly mastered."

Many of these offending CDs were mastered during a period between 1995 and 2010, branded 'the Loudness War'. This was caused by mastering engineers and record companies getting excited about new digital technology emerging at the time. Consequently, they attempted, using digital technology, to make finished album masters as loud as possible, by pushing compression past the point of distortion. The resulting releases were criticised, quite rightly, as lacking any authentic dynamic range. They display what's called 'high frequency clipping', where the delicate top end of the music momentarily disappears. Examples you may find in your collection are the above Red Hot Chili Peppers record and follow-up *Stadium Arcadium*, Metallica's *Death Magnetic*, Arctic Monkeys' debut, Radiohead's *Hail To The Thief*, *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?* and, interestingly, Keane's *Hopes And Fears* and follow-up *Under The Iron Sea.* While few of these albums are hugely valuable on vinyl, all of them sound better in their vinyl versions and, as such, are what both fans and collectors want.

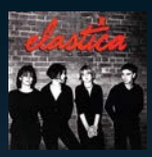
Of course, this period was not just about alt-rock, trip-hop and Britpop; this was, after all, the period when artists such as Eminem, Beyoncé and Britney Spears dominated the charts. Are hip-hop and pop vinyl releases just as popular? Well, certainly Eminem's *The Slim Shady LP* commands a healthy £40, but other original vinyl releases, from artists such as Snoop Dogg and OutKast, cost less than the price of a Smiths re-release. And while Beyoncé and Britney might have dominated the CD sales charts, even when they were deemed worthy of a vinyl release by ▶

THE PERIOD BETWEEN 1995 AND 2010 WAS BRANDED 'THE LOUDNESS WAR'

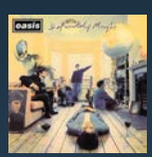


Björk is just one of many successful artists from the era whose catalogue is being reissued on limited-edition vinyl

Garbage
Garbage
(Mushroom 1995)
Discogs £50
Consummate and professional pop-rock, housed in a lovely pink sleeve. What's not to like about Nirvana's producer rescuing Shirley Manson from Goodbye Mr. Mackenzie?



Elastica
Elastica
(Deceptive 1995)
Flexidisc and booklet
Discogs £150
Released back in the days when Radio 1 DJs could have record labels, due to the unique way the BBC was funded, this still sounds great on vinyl. It all went downhill afterwards, but what a kick-off! Make sure you get the original, which came with Justine's version of Adam And The Ants' *Cleopatra* on a flexidisc plus 12-page booklet *Elasticatalogue*.



Oasis
Definitely Maybe
(Creation 1994)
Discogs £100
Yes, lots of people will tell you the second one is their best, but their debut is the one that Noel rates and he's got reasonably good taste. Plus, the fabulous photograph of Bonehead's front room on the cover works best on a 12" square.

Bruce Springsteen
The Rising
(Columbia 2002)
Discogs £230
Forest Vinyl's Steve Helsdown rightly points out that all Springsteen's 90s and 00s vinyl is valuable, but none more so than this. Musically worth it alone for the title track, but hey, will you actually be playing it at this price? Quick! Buy a plastic outer sleeve!

Teenage Fanclub
Grand Prix
(Creation 1995)
£120 Discogs (NM £130)
All of the Fannies' albums are worth getting on vinyl (including last year's fabulous *Here*), but this one's got *Sparky's Dream* on it. Plus, if you're lucky, it contains a 7". And the Formula One car on the artwork looks amazing in proper LP size.

their labels, Discogs' prices for it suggest collectors are not exactly Crazy In Love.

Back at Forest Vinyl, I ask Steve if he sells any 90s and 2000s vinyl that isn't in the alt-rock/trip-hop category: "Well, I suppose one example is Bryan Ferry. His album *Mamouna*, from 1994, goes for around £80. And Richard Thompson's *Mirror Blue*, too. When he was doing his 1980s albums, 90% of the sales were on vinyl. When *Mirror Blue* came out, the situation was reversed, so it's worth about £60. And all of Bruce Springsteen's albums from the 90s and 2000s are now worth big money, too – particularly *The Rising* from 2002."

SPICE UP YOUR COLLECTION

Simon rightly points out that the Spice Girls' debut *Spice* also fetches big money. He then suggests that breakbeat artists such as The Chemical Brothers, Fatboy Slim and Leftfield are all very collectible. The market, however, appears to have moved, since none of these artists appear to command anything like, say, Teenage Fanclub or The White Stripes vinyl does on Discogs or eBay. Perhaps breakbeat as a genre lent itself more to vinyl at the time, so more was pressed and sold and the all-important scarcity missed. One glaring pop exception is Dido's *No Angel*, which can fetch up to £350. Manufactured for the UK and Ireland in 2001 when the album was re-released in the wake of Eminem's sampling of *Thank You*, this is the key exception – which proves the rule that alt-rock vinyl from the period is king.

So, if you fancy getting your hands on some of these albums, where do you start, particularly if you're a fan of an album that hasn't yet been reissued?

"I think the majors are still going through a period of discovering what is around from that era that makes sense on LP," says Jason. "They are often so steeped in the heritage-rock era that they forget the 90s. I'm sure there are more things what will be unearthed. Music On Vinyl in the UK has done a great job tapping into this vein, reissuing things properly: great sound and attention to detail with the art. I have the Screaming Trees' *Sweet Oblivion* they put out and it sounds brilliant!"

And what about if you're looking for hard-to-find originals? "Often you have to go to Japanese dealers to buy LPs from that era," Jason says. "There was massive collectability there and the Japanese would pay top dollar. They'd import US and Euro pressings, so a lot of that era's vinyl wound up in Japan. I had to buy my copy of Velvet Crush's *Teenage Symphonies To God* from a seller there. But I think the market has collapsed there now."

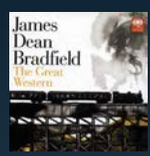
Which takes us back to Sean and myself in the pub, pouring over the Japanese Disk Union catalogue. What's the future? "I don't really specialise in 90s vinyl anymore now," he says, as his eyes begin to mist over with a fresh enthusiasm. "I'm focusing on the music I truly love, improvised music, jazz and soundtracks – have you heard the *Akira* soundtrack by Geinoh Yamashirogumi? I couldn't sell enough of that album when it was reissued!"

And with that, we're off on another journey. And another story. ●

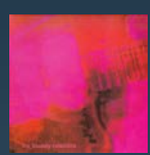
Spritualized's innovatively packaged *Ladies And Gentlemen...* LP is hugely valuable

Getty

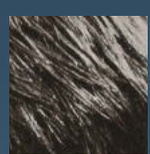
The Verve
A Northern Soul
Ltd Edition Silver 'Specular' cover
(Virgin 1995)
Discogs £70
The one that came out before the band dragged the 90s to a close with *Urban Hymns*. Early copies have a lovely silver sleeve which you can see your face in – a face that might be looking a bit regretful at having shelled out so much for a record you should have bought back in the day...



James Dean Bradfield
The Great Western
(Columbia 2006)
Discogs £100
A copy of Manic Street Preachers' *Gold Against The Soul* or *The Holy Bible*'s picture disc will set you back £60-£80. Singer James Dean Bradfield's solo album is pricier and scarcer, having been released a year before vinyl's annus horribilis.



My Bloody Valentine *Loveless*
(Creation 1991)
£140 Discogs
Despite being released in a period when vinyl was still selling relatively well, MBV's follow-up to *Isn't Anything* nonetheless benefits in value – firstly, from never having had an official label release (despite numerous unofficial ones) and secondly, from just being bloody brilliant.



The Divine Comedy
Fin De Siècle
(Setanta 1998)
Discogs £80
The final Setanta album for Mr Hannon and also the final vinyl release for 12 years (thanks Parlophone!), until 2010's *Bang Goes The Knighthood*. It's beautifully done.

Spiritualized
Ladies And Gentlemen We Are Floating In Space
(Dedicated 1997)
Discogs £150
Well before Damien Hirst, Jason Pierce and co. had the idea of co-opting pharmaceutical packaging and went to town on this their fourth album. The vinyl version is much sought after and hugely valuable.

LONG LIVE VINYL

Complete the 2017 reader survey for your chance to WIN A SET OF AUDIO-TECHNICA ATH-MSR7 HEADPHONES WORTH £169

WIN!

To take part in the survey, go to
https://anthem.typeform.com/to/zVaCH7

WIN!

The Stooges and Morphine rarities

From Run Out Groove

This month, our good friends at Run Out Groove have given us another pair of releases to give away to one lucky *Long Live Vinyl* reader. First is The Stooges' *Highlights From The Fun House Sessions*. This brand-new title collects the best outtakes from the *Fun House* seven-CD boxset into a Deluxe two-LP set, and is limited to 2,906 numbered copies worldwide. The second release is Morphine's *Live At The Warfield 1997*. This unreleased performance, co-produced by saxophonist Dana Colley, includes unseen photographs and examples of Mark Sandman's artwork. The two-LP Deluxe set is limited to 2,555 numbered copies worldwide and includes an insert with five fan-submitted stories chosen by Dana.

Our lucky winner will also receive a Run Out Groove slipmat and record-cleaning brush. For more information on Run Out Groove and to vote for the label's next releases, visit www.runoutgroovevinyl.com.

For your chance to win, go to
longlivevinyl.net/rogcompnovember
and answer the following question:

When was *Fun House* by The Stooges released?

A 1960 **B** 1970 **C** 1980

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JAPAN'S STRANGE & BEAUTIFUL SOUNDS

Giacomo Lee takes a look at the return of Japan's 1980s scene, and the sought-after vinyl releases from the decade which are winning new fans around the world today...

Conversations on Japanese music usually start with the late 70s and the debut of synth-pop trio Yellow Magic Orchestra (whose *Behind The Mask* was famously covered by Michael Jackson) and end with J-pop, that glorious multicoloured beast which rose with the advent of the CD in the 90s. In between, though, is a whole forgotten era of records that have yet to see a re-release or, in some cases, even an original release outside of Japan, regardless of format. We're talking about music of a strange and beautiful type, which in recent years has seen a remarkable upsurge in interest from foreign vinyl fans not afraid to add a little adventure to their collections.

The recent focus on 1980s sounds from Japan arguably began with a clamour for the release of two rather different records. The first album in question, *Utakata No Hibi*, was the final one by a six-strong band of brothers calling themselves Mariah. Much like the rest of the band's discography, it came and went in 1983 without particular fanfare, nor any international distributor. The latter is no surprise; not many alternative artists besides Yellow Magic Orchestra and synth legend Isao Tomita had been picked up for release in the States or Europe by this point.

Something strange happened, though, when, almost three decades after the album's release, examples of Mariah's unique collision of art-rock and exotic mantra-filled mysticism began to make their way into popular online mixes.

A CD re-release by Colombia Japan in 2009 helped the legend grow, as Western fans clamoured for a new wax edition to experience Mariah's kaleidoscope of world sounds in richer fidelity. Prices of the original rose as the word spread, but nothing was happening either side of the globe; skip to 2015, when *Utakata No Hibi* found its home again on vinyl, thanks to the American label Palto Flats.

The fact that Palto Flats didn't specialise in Japanese releases beforehand showed the album's crossover potential. "I think it's an extremely accessible record, which helps," agrees label owner Jacob Gorchov. "I'm amused sometimes that some folks don't know the backstory, which I think indicates that people like good music regardless of where it's from – that context isn't essential to enjoying something in a direct way."

Arguably, Mariah's record doesn't even sound typically Japanese. Many of the lyrics are sung in Armenian, for example, as drum rhythms borrow from distinctly African roots; other sounds, meanwhile, travel in climes ranging from India to Southeast Asia.

This miasma of styles is arguably what gave the record its cult status, with its overall success convincing Palto Flats to put out another rare Japanese LP from the same year, *Through The Looking Glass* by Midori Takada.

This lean four-track collection, originally put out by major label RCA Red Seal, stands in heavy contrast to the collaborative and production-heavy methods of Mariah. Recorded over the course of two days by one woman, the minimalism of Takada's music reflects its humble backstory, sounding very little like the rich and luscious explorations of its counterpart. It's the final track – *Catastrophe* – though, which finds common ground between both albums, playing out as it does with an infusion of African percussion.

LUNAR TUNES

The album proved not only to be a success for Palto Flats, but also for Belgian label We Release Whatever The Fuck We Want (WRWTFWW), who gave the record a European release earlier this year. September will see the label re-issue *Lunar Cruise*, the 1990 collaborative album by Midori Takada and Masahiko Satoh, which they describe as 'the best kept secret in the Takada discography'. "It's somewhat of an under-the-radar masterpiece," explain Stephan Armleder and Olivier Ducret from the label. "A marimba and minimal percussion setup vibrantly mixes with synths, a sampler and an acoustic piano. It's absolutely gorgeous, a great companion to *Through The Looking Glass*."

Palto Flats, meanwhile, will be brushing off a 1982 LP by one of the Mariah members, Yasuaki Shimizu's *Kakashi*. The album is considered to be Shimizu's best solo work, with hints of his main group's wandering eclecticism coming head to head with his own free-form jazz stylings. "I'm happy about the reappraisal of both Mr Shimizu and Ms Takada's work," says Gorchov. "They're going to be playing shows now, as well – people don't always realise these are lifetime musicians with a body of work that spans decades."

Above, Yellow Magic Orchestra

Seta Evanian and Morio Watanabe of Mariah

Lisa Schiavon

any geography, other than what American trumpeter Jon Hassell defined as the 'fourth world', an imaginary region of music that comes from the blending of traditional folk sounds with Western styles and modern technology.

The most famous release from Victor outside of Japan is probably the soundtrack to groundbreaking anime film *Akira*, the sci-fi tale of a bunch of Tokyo biker kids fighting dystopian forces. Again, we find a surprisingly uncommercial decision with regards to the soundtrack, as the producers behind the one-billion-yen project opted to go with music from a freak folk collective, whose transient membership numbered in the hundreds. Geinoh Yamashirogumi was the name of the act, and their glacial gamelan compositions for *Akira* were released across two records by Victor in 1988, the year of the movie's release.

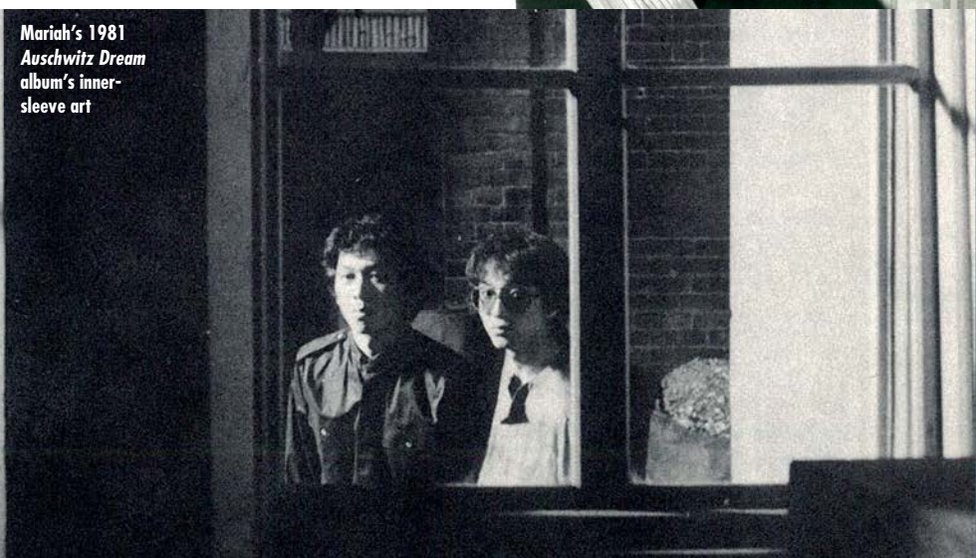
"It just shows that taking chances on a non-traditional approach to film music often brings unique results," says Jean-Christophe Chamboredon of Milan Records, the esteemed soundtrack label that's

THE ONE-BILLION-YEN FILM'S PRODUCERS OPTED FOR MUSIC FROM A FREAK FOLK COLLECTIVE

THE UNCOMMERCIAL SOUNDS OF VICTOR

Discussing the obscurity and value of the original records, it can be easy to forget that such distinctly uncommercial releases were actually put out by major labels, or subsidiaries owned by the big names such as Colombia and Alfa Records. The most prolific and perhaps bravest of these was Victor, the music branch of electronics giant JVC. The most singular release associated with Victor is its most mysterious and sought after – the only LP by a short-lived project known as Aragon. Released on sub-label Invitation in 1985, the eponymous *Aragon* comes clouded in a veil of secrecy. Its front cover bears little resemblance to the music; like an oblique still from a horror movie, it shows an imprint of a hand trapped in the edge of a particularly grimy door. The sleeve notes give minimal details of the musicians involved, while cryptic track titles heighten the sense of unease. That's until you listen to the music, though, which is some of the most startling and halcyon you'll ever hear. It's an 80s record, but the music is timeless, of no fixed era. Some tracks have the hushed cordiality of medieval chamber music; others float in on synth waves beneath almost operatic vocals. It is also a displaced record, hard to pin down to

Mariah's Yasuaki Shimizu



Mariah's 1981 *Auschwitz Dream* album's inner-sleeve art

ESSENTIAL SONGS OF A LOST ERA

To start off your journey into Japanese vinyl, we've selected essential tracks from some of the country's long-lost classic acts…

Hana Ga Saitara
Artist Mariah
Album
Utakata No Hibi
Label
Better Days, 1983
Shinzo No Tobira is the most popular track from the *Mariah* LP, from its appearances on both digital mixes and CD compilations. But for us, *Hana Ga Saitara* is the standout, a song so forward-looking, it feels as though it was produced yesterday.

Wässer
Artist Inoyama Land
Album
Danzindan-Pojidon
Label
Yen Records, 1983
A possible inspiration behind the *Twin Peaks* theme, this crystalline beauty was produced by Inoyama Land long before Angelo Badalamenti used almost the same chords for his signature piece on the show. Also, check out Hiroshi Yoshimura.

Hotel Malabar Roof Garden (Revel Attack)
Artist
Haruomi Hosono With Tadanori Yokoo
Album *Cochin Moon*
Label
King Records, 1978
A 10-minute musical odyssey, wherein malfunctioning robot sounds mix with the buzz of a mosquito; eerie vocoder voices then take over, to be replaced by heavenly harps.

Untotooku
Artist
Chiemi Manabe
Album
Fushigi Shoujo
Label
CBS/Sony, 1982
For an album title that translates as 'mysterious girl', *Untotooku* is an aptly sibylline song. Produced by Haroumi Hosono, Manabe's song is a brooding affair that stands out from the more pop-ish fare on her LP.

Horridula
Artist Aragon
Album *Aragon*
Label
Invitation, 1985
There's nothing even remotely horrid about this elemental yet artificial Aragon song, which sounds as earthy as a breeze blowing through the desert, yet as man-made as a planetarium laser show. Computer chips are made from sand after all, aren't they?

You Need Me
Artist
Chakra
Album
Satekoso
Label
Victor, 1981
Released by the groundbreaking Victor, Chakra's tribal and polyrhythmic fourth world isn't actually a million miles away in its approach from modern outfits such as American experimentalists Animal Collective.

The *Akira* score, reissued on vinyl by soundtrack label Milan Records

bringing the *Akira* soundtrack back to wax this autumn.

"To me, these are the types of experiments that bring excitement to film music. The opening scene, with the building of Neo Tokyo, the bike chases and that amazing piece of score using traditional Japanese instruments with the voices screaming? It's just the best!"

In an interesting side note, the *Akira* soundtrack featured members of Aragon playing as part of the more stripped-down ensemble that Geinoh Yamashirogumi's founding father, Tsutomu Ōhashi, employed on the movie. It was said that Ōhashi was so impressed by the *Aragon* LP that he invited the group to work with him on the feature, another reminder that despite being a major label, Victor truly did have the feel of an art commune.

Midori Takada's *Through The Looking Glass* (above), and *Lunar Cruise*

pop excursion that Marriott describes as highly innovative and pioneering. "It's evident that Sakamoto and Hosono are both fantastic songwriters and composers, and that has helped their longevity," he says, namechecking another YMO member known for his production work, Haruomi Hosono, whose works ranged from starry-eyed pop such as Chiemi Manabe's *Fushigi Shōjo* (1982), to the stellar ambience of Inoyama Land's *Danzindan-Pojidon* (1983).

Hosono's own solo works are also well regarded; before YMO, he had a collection of albums to his name that dabbled in some pretty outré soundscapes. *Cochin Moon,* from 1978, is the best known of these, an LP that's both a visual and auditory delight. Inspired by a trip to India, and intended as the soundtrack to a fictional movie, *Cochin Moon* somehow leaps from Bollywood one second to bleepy electronica the next. The colourful 'collage' feel of the music is reflected in a gorgeous front cover by prominent graphic designer Tadanori Yokoo, fittingly beguiling artwork for a record which – when a limited reissue was arranged in Japan for Record Store Day 2016 – sounded as delightfully oddball as it did in 1978.

With all the re-releases mentioned above, along with a forthcoming Japan Archival Series from Seattle's esteemed Light In The Attic, there clearly has never been a better time to take a walk in the fourth world and navigate these obscure gems on vinyl. When asking the various labels about why there's a sudden supply and demand for these records, Jacob of Palto Flats has one theory.

"I think there's definitely a primary interest in this general aesthetic of sound, shared by all these artists," he says. "Sounds that are of interest to listeners now – world, new age, folk, electronic."

Jean-Christophe from Milan Records has another theory. "I remember going to LA's Anime Expo a few years ago and there were only around 20,000 attendees. The 2016 edition had more than 100,000! There is a renewed interest in Japanese media in the USA, with anime series such as *Attack On Titan*, and Hayao Miyazaki films such as *Spirited Away*."

"These are unique, timeless and insanely great albums," say WRWTFWW's Stephan and Olivier when giving their own take. "Such beautiful music must be heard and made available to all." Vinyl lovers will agree. Thanks to the labels and aficionados, these lost classics are now back, with no chance of going away this time. Long live the strange and beautiful sounds of 1980s Japan! ●

'COCHIN MOON' LEAPS FROM BOLLYWOOD ONE SECOND TO BLEEPY ELECTRONICA THE NEXT

ELECTRONIC REVOLUTION

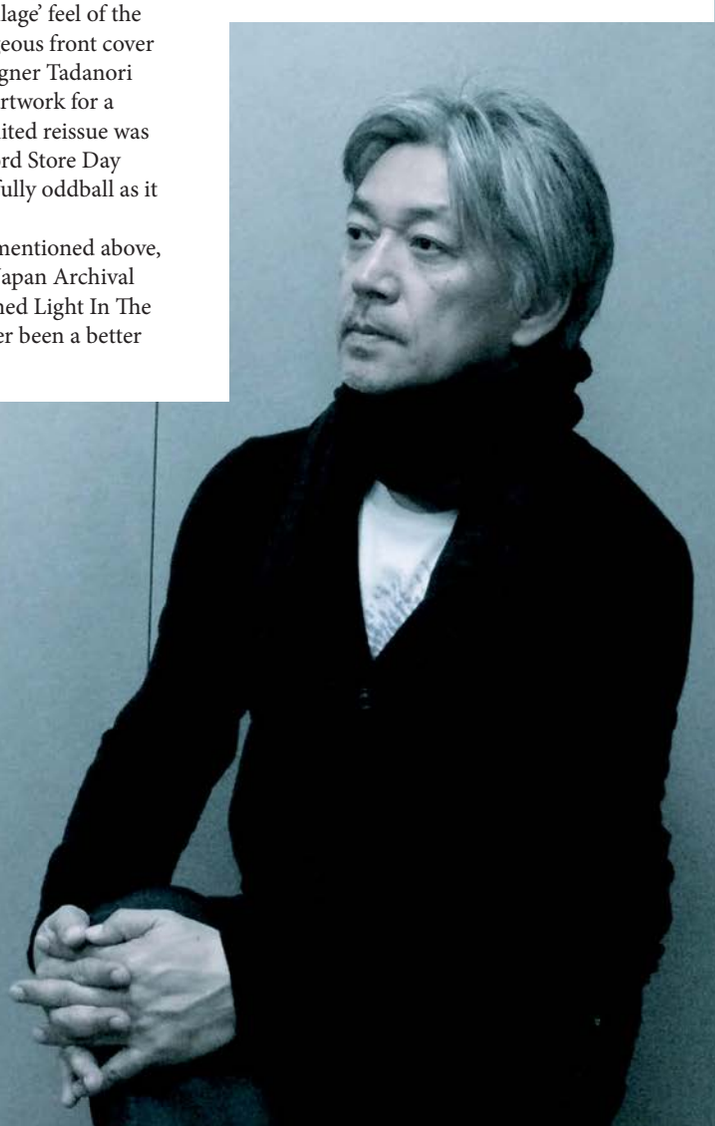
Yet to be mentioned so far are the band who arguably popularised synth and electronic music in Japan. Yellow Magic Orchestra, or YMO as they're more commonly known, became ubiquitous in 1980s Japan through the release of classic records such as *Solid State Survivor* and *Technodelic*, which are often considered essentials in the electronic-music field. Their success opened the floodgates to equally remarkable synth-pop albums, such as Logic System's *Logic* and Colored Music's *Colored Music*, both hailing from 1981.

"I think YMO are all over so much Japanese pop, electronic, experimental music from this era," says Todd Marriott, owner of new UK label, Lag Records. "They might have produced, written, performed, or just inspired these artists. You can hear their influence everywhere." Lag's first release will be the 1986 single *Neo-Plant* by Koharu Kisaragi, produced by YMO member Ryuichi Sakamoto. The pair's only collaboration is an off-the-wall synth-

Above, Koharu Kisaragi and Ryuichi Sakamoto's *Neo-Plant*, the first release from Lag Records

Left, Colored Music's eponymous 1981 release, reissued by Better Days

Right, Composer and YMO member Ryuichi Sakamoto



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THE NATIONAL

BEAUTY OF THE BEAST

Approaching their 20th year and having overcome the struggles of their early career, The National have become the worst-kept secret in indie music; the thinking-man's stadium band. In seventh album *Sleep Well Beast*, they've made their most ambitious, experimental record yet – and have been rewarded with their first No. 1. **Gary Walker** meets the band's guitar-playing twins Aaron and Bryce Dessner to find out how they did it…

Matt Berninger surveys the sprawling human vanishing point of Glastonbury's vanquished Pyramid Stage crowd, while either side of him the Dessner twins hold aloft their vintage guitars, howling feedback ripping into the twilight sky. Sandwiched into a surreal slot between the absurdist circus of international pop megastar Katy Perry and headliners Foo Fighters, The National have just previewed their seventh album, the electronic-infused *Sleep Well Beast*, to 80,000 people and a global TV audience.

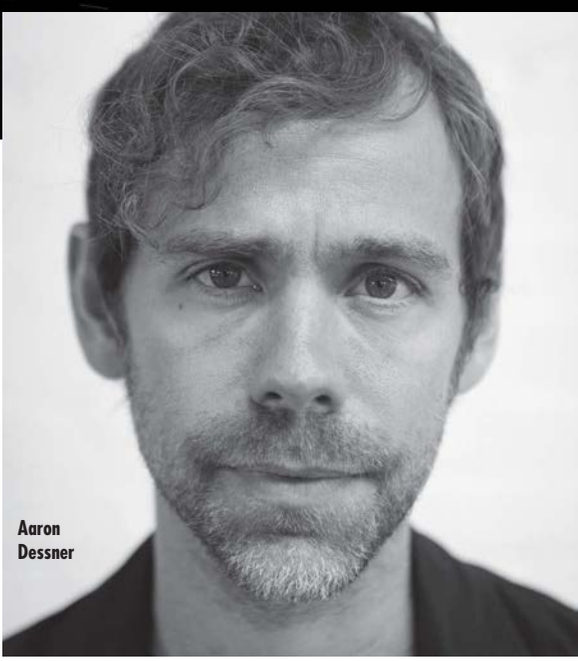
Two decades on from their formation, Ohio's kings of immersive melancholy find themselves in this vertiginous position, receiving payback for their early years of grinding struggle, under-the-radar albums and endless touring. It's taken a long time, but the slow, organic rise of a band whose music seeps into your consciousness and digs in its hooks has carried them to the pinnacle. They're now one of the biggest indie acts in the world and album seven, their most sonically diverse, has landed the band their first UK No. 1.

Whole orchestras fired through guitar pedals co-exist with skittering electronic drum beats, time signature shifts, mesmerising harp arpeggios and savage guitar solos, while Berninger probes the dissolution of marriage and the current political malaise afflicting America – the sleeping beast that is our reaction to mass trauma. The National have done it their way.

"I think there is definitely a sense of 'we earned it'," reflects the album's producer Aaron Dessner, the band's chief sonic architect alongside twin brother and co-guitarist Bryce. "Nothing came easily, we didn't compromise, we never benefited from any kind of hype or media frenzy. It was hard and we put in a lot of work, craftsmanship, attention to detail and obsession. I wouldn't say it's myopic, but it takes a long time to make records and it took us a long time to become a good live band. I don't know how many live shows we've played, but it's thousands and we've earned the right to enjoy this.

Getty

Aaron Dessner and, below, Matt Berninger on stage at Glastonbury this summer



Aaron Dessner

"It's humbling when you find yourself in front of 80,000 people at Glastonbury and you're like: 'Really? Our awkward little rock songs?'. We used to play in basements and attics for three friends, and for quite a long time it was just a small thing. But we kept at it and, at some point, we started to have this drive and really put our heads down to make something great."

SLOW BURN

Sleep Well Beast is the most experimental album in a catalogue of majestic, refined records that have seen the band grow exponentially, supported by exhaustive globe-spanning tours as the world slowly caught on. But for many years, the band's intricate sonic tapestries, sorrowful melodies and lyrics exploring anxiety and existential fear fell on deaf ears. Their first two albums – *The National* and *Sad Songs For Dirty Lovers* – went unheard by all but a few thousand early evangelists.

Berninger, The National's besuited frontman with a mournful Malbec-soaked baritone, tells an anecdote about how, in 2005, having signed to Beggars Banquet and released third album *Alligator*, the band embarked on a tour with New York friends Clap Your Hands Say Yeah as support. Opportunity knocked. Yet on the eve of the tour, the support act's debut album became an unexpected cult hit, and the shows sold out. Each night, The National would sit in the dressing room listening to the crushing sound of much of the venue emptying after the support act finished. Six years into their career, it felt like a nadir, but stiffened their resolve. They were in their 30s, living together in Brooklyn and flat broke.

"To tell you the truth, that hurt," said Berninger, years later. "I just guess at that time, people weren't that interested in our band. We slept in youth hostels and vans. At that time, I'm 32, 33, laying in a hostel with drunk Scottish kids puking and screaming. I remember lying there nearly in tears, like, 'What am I doing with my life?'. I can't tell you how many times I've stared at the roof of a van, or the ceiling, on somebody's floor thinking, 'What am I doing with my life? This is not worth it.'"

It was worth it. Following the success of 2007's *Boxer*, an album that's cherished

as a cult classic by many music fans and saw Barack Obama adopt its opening track *Fake Empire* as a campaign anthem, in 2010 *High Violet* catapulted them further into the mainstream. Three years later, the sonically lush, cerebral and deeply melancholic *Trouble Will Find Me* elevated The National to the rarefied status of arena tours and festival headliners. The question became, how could they follow it?

After the final show of 2014's *Trouble Will Find Me* tour, at London's cavernous 20,000-capacity 02 Arena, Aaron began building a studio at his house in upstate New York. Inspired by Bon Iver main man Justin Vernon's April Base setup in Wisconsin, he christened the rural bolthole Long Pond. With The National now dispersed around the globe – Aaron mainly in Copenhagen, Bryce in Paris, Matt in LA, drummer Bryan Devendorf back in Cincinnati and his brother, bassist Scott, in Long Island – that was a crucial move. So much so that an image of the studio is the centrepiece of the album's artwork.

BROTHERS, WHERE ART THOU?

While *Trouble Will Find Me* was drawn together from remote contributions, this time, The National wanted to make a 'band album', with early interviews citing a wish to return to the more raw, immediate spirit of *Alligator*. There, in the idyllic solitude of Hudson Valley, surrounded by bullfrogs, snapping turtles and herons, the band locked themselves away with no distractions and complete focus.

"I started writing a bunch of ideas towards the end of the tour," says Aaron, "and I remember when we played the O2 Arena in November, Matt and I were talking about some of them. The music for *Carin At The Liquor Store* and *Nobody Else Will Be There* and a few others already existed, and he was excited about them, but then Bryce and I were developing a lot of new ideas and thinking about how to change the process and push it into some other spaces.

"We've been experimenting with electronics [since the start of the band], it was just, oftentimes, if things like that were there, they were below the surface. There was never a conscious decision to go more electronic, it was literally that we wrote so much music. Some of it was very natural, us in a room playing, and others were us experimenting with all kinds of software, drum machines, samplers… and using them as compositional tools. It wasn't meant to be leaving behind analogue sounds."

"We're never deliberate, in that we don't make 'concept records'," adds Bryce. "There was a feeling that, even with *Alligator*, we'd never captured the sound of the band live."

That live sound is evident on a pair of songs that feature some of the most wanton guitar playing in the band's career; the Donald Trump-scalding *Turtleneck* ["Just another man in shitty suits, everybody's cheering for… This must be the genius we've been waiting years for"] and the album's lead single, *The System Only Dreams In Total Darkness*, the latter possessing quite possibly the most memorable guitar solo of 2017.

"The big difference with this record is Aaron built a studio, where we're finally able to work all together in a non-pressurised environment," says Bryce. "That did lead to a looser recording atmosphere. There is a more experimental, more architectured sound, but also there are songs like *Turtleneck* and *Day I Die* that are all of us live, recorded."

The band are famed for the tension and explosive disagreements that often

COLLECTOR'S EDITIONS

A LOT OF SORROW

2015 4AD 9LP BOXSET

In 2013, The National joined forces with Icelandic performance artist Ragnar Kjartansson for a 'durational performance' at New York's MoMA PS1. It involved playing the song *Sorrow*, from their *High Violet* album, in a live continuous loop for six hours. The recordings were subsequently released as a 9LP clear-vinyl boxset limited to 1,500 copies, with all profits going to the charity Partners In Health. Despite the somewhat repetitive tracklisting, copies now change hands for over £200 on Discogs.

BOXER

2017, 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION VINYL ME, PLEASE

Pressed on 150-gram grey vinyl to mark the 10th anniversary of what many critics and fans regard as The National's finest album, this reissue was released via the subscription service Vinyl Me, Please. It comes with an art print by Philip Johnson and a 7" single, comprising the first two songs released from *Sleep Well Beast – The System Only Dreams In Total Darkness* and *Guilty Party*.

"NOTHING CAME EASILY. WE NEVER BENEFITED FROM ANY HYPE OR MEDIA FRENZY"

Bryce Dessner

punctuate recording and mixing sessions, with Aaron and Bryce spending months weaving highly evolved sonic sketches before Berninger arrives late in the process to unpick them. It's earned Bryce a role as mediator, and the nickname 'Switzerland'.

"This process was a lot more fun," he says. "There was room for everyone, we all enjoyed being there. Our past records, at least the last few, even when we were living in the same city, we were more and more separate. This time, Matt really enjoyed being there and spent a lot of time with us, which was really healthy. The tension always happens more at the end of the process and that was no different. It might even have been a little worse, because typically, we're all there, but my baby was born in the first week of mixing.

"Aaron and I develop the music very elaborately, but the moment when Matt comes in and tells us to throw our [musical] babies out of the window, that's the hard time and Aaron had to go through that alone this time."

Against that backdrop of creative tension, the freedom to collaborate has been crucial in extending The National's life expectancy. Since *Trouble Will Find Me*, they've each been involved in a dizzying array of projects. The band assembled an all-star cast of 70 indie/Americana musicians to curate the six-hour Grateful Dead tribute boxset *Day Of The Dead*. Berninger formed the lo-fi indie band EL VY with Menomena's Brent Knopf, and Scott and Bryan became the experimental krautrock act LNZNDRF.

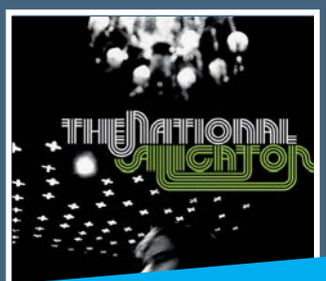
DESSNER, SURPRISE ME

In that time, Aaron has launched several music festivals, while producing records by This Is The Kit, Frightened Rabbit, Local Natives and Lisa Hannigan. He also co-wrote the score for the film adaptation of Jack Kerouac's *Big Sur* with Bryce, and the twins worked on the performance-art piece *Forever Love* with Icelandic performance artist Ragnar Kjartansson. Bryce, who has a Masters in music from Yale and a background in classical composition, has been perhaps busiest of all. He's worked on a project for the New York City Ballet, written an orchestral piece for the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Golden Globe-nominated score for *The Revenant* with Ryuichi Sakamoto. He produced the Grammy-winning album *Filament*, made the solar system-inspired *Planetarium* record with friends Nico Muhly and Sufjan Stevens and puts on Cincinnati's MusicNOW festival every year.

With the initial demos of *Sleep Well Beast* in the bag, this collaborative spirit

"WE'RE PRETTY RESTLESS AS A GROUP AND I THINK THAT ENDS UP PUSHING YOU FORWARD"

HOW TO BUY THE NATIONAL



ALLIGATOR
BEGGARS BANQUET, 2005

The record that began their ascent. More raw and serrated around the edges than the quartet that followed, it contains some of the band's best live songs – such as *Mr November*, *Abel* and the majestic *All The Wine*. *Sample lyric: "Karen, we should call your father, maybe it's just a phase/ He'll know the trick to get a wayward soul to change his ways/ It's a common fetish for a doting man/ To ballerina on the coffee table cock in hand"*

TROUBLE WILL FIND ME
4AD, 2013

An immersive, bleakly beautiful album. Elaborately layered compositions, unusual time signatures and Berninger discovering a higher-register vocal made for a delicately woven, sedative brew. *Sample lyric: "I have only two emotions/ Careful fear and dead devotion/ I can't get the balance right/ Throw my marbles in the fight"*

BOXER
BEGGARS BANQUET, 2007

The polyrhythmic piano of opener *Fake Empire* gives way to a varied work of striking musicianship and razor-sharp observational lyricism. *Sample lyric: "You get mistaken for strangers by your own friends/ When you pass them at night/ Under the silvery, silvery Citibank lights/ Arm in arm in arm and eyes and eyes glazing under"*

HIGH VIOLET
4AD, 2010

Possibly their most accessible record, *High Violet* lifted The National to a higher level. There's not a weak song, from the anthemic *Bloodbuzz Ohio*, the existential paranoia of *I'm Afraid Of Everyone* and the elegant *England* through to traditional encore choice *Vanderlyle Crybaby Geeks*. A work of brilliance. *Sample lyric: "I was a comfortable kid/ But I don't think about it much anymore/ Lay me on the table, put flowers in my mouth/ And we can say that we invented a summer lovin' torture party"*

Berninger in typically all-action mode, during a live performance

helped shape the record. The Dessners and Justin Vernon curated the Funkhaus collaboration of 80 musicians in Berlin, including members of Bon Iver, Wye Oak and alt-J. While there, they invited a selection of those artists to jam over the demos, injecting a new avant-garde sense of adventure. The presence of German electronic band Mouse On Mars was particularly pivotal.

"As a band, we tend to be quite open in our process," says Aaron. "This goes back to how Bryce and I grew up playing music, always in the same room, and then our friends were round… we were never alone writing a song, it was always collaborative. Bryce has gone into composition, which is more solitary, but our approach to the band is very open. We've always had other collaborators. Early on, it was Padma Newsom, Sufjan, Richie [Reed Parry] from Arcade Fire, Justin Vernon, Thomas Bartlett, and all these people have really influenced the music. All that stuff feeds in, and we're definitely not the kind of band to be in love with our own shadow. We're still pretty critical and self-aware. It's not like we think we have the best guitar tones, or best anything, we're just trying to make great albums that we can believe in, whatever it takes. Whether that's writing with other people or trying something totally new, or building something up and knocking it down – we do that a lot. We're pretty restless as a group of people and I think that ends up pushing you forward."

Matt Berninger

CRY BABY STRINGS

The sessions continued to a third country, Bryce recruiting a classical ensemble to record *Sleep Well Beast*'s orchestration at Studio Saint Germain in Paris. However, that wasn't the end of the process, as he and Aaron separated the individual channels of the recordings, feeding them through different guitar effects and piecing the results together into the otherworldly stew that underpins moments such as *I'll Still Destroy You*'s stunning coda – a transcendental passage of music that gives a degree of credence to recent critiques of The National as the 'American Radiohead'.

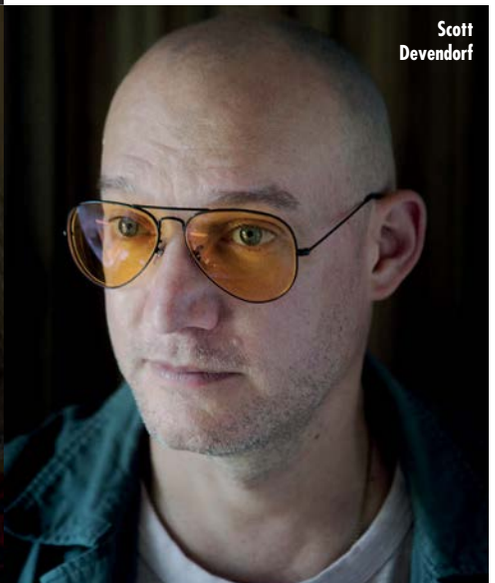
"That song didn't feel finished to me, so I took the drumbeat and sampled it, and reprocessed and reprogrammed the drums," says Bryce. "The song modulates key there, and the strings bring it up. I wrote that orchestral arrangement to tie it together. There's about 30 strings and seven or eight wind or brass in that ensemble. We did some really elaborate arrangements and then cut them up and processed them. It's like an orchestra played through an effects pedal, basically."

The Dessners' appetite for musical adventure was whetted in their childhood, soundtracked by their father's classic rock and jazz fusion vinyl collection and their sister Jessica's taste for post-punk and alt-rock. That shared education spawned the near-telepathic guitar style that's the very essence of The National. "We grew up with my dad's and sister's records," says Bryce. "In dad's case, it was all 60s stuff. The big records were *Sgt. Pepper's…*, *Harvest*, *Sounds Of Silence* – classic records – then all the jazz records he listened to…

"He had Weather Report records, too, a lot of Joni Mitchell, which I've come back to recently. The other side of it would be my sister's music collection, which was more punk and post-punk and bands more current to the late 80s and 90s."

Bryan Devendorf

Scott Devendorf



Graham MacIndoe

The National, beside the pond that gave Aaron's upstate New York studio its name

"The Smiths, Hüsker Dü, Pixies…" remembers Aaron. "We'd take all our dad's Beatles, Stones, Grateful Dead, Allman Brothers, The Band and Dylan records and transfer them from vinyl to cassette. We'd be fighting over records and when our sister felt like being nice to us, she'd help us and be like, 'Here's the *White Album*, now don't bug me for it anymore.'"

"We were probably seven years old, and then at some point she challenged us because there was an Allman Brothers instrumental called *Jessica*. It was around about the time we started playing guitar and she said: 'You'll never be able to play that'. We were like: 'You just wait and see…'".

10 YEARS AFTER

As well as the release of *Sleep Well Beast*, 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of *Boxer*. A decade on, it's a perfect portrait of The National as masters of restraint and still regarded by many fans as their finest work. The record was made at a time of numbing self doubt and artistic struggle for The National's members, documented in the film *A Skin, A Night* – an illuminating portrait of a band battling to make their defining statement, after watching Brooklyn peers such as The Strokes, Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Interpol blow up overnight.

"The years of touring and harsh living… it was the moment before we became successful enough to at least pay our rent," says Bryce. "People's lives were falling apart a bit at that time, it was personally very hard for everyone and we were holding things together and holding each other up and doing it because we loved it. Also, politically, things were about to shift in a big way and that played into the story of the album. It was a very intense time.

"On *Alligator*, we were flailing around, and it was recorded in much harsher conditions. We didn't have much of an audience. By *Boxer*, we'd grown a bit. On some level, *Alligator* was the first small success we'd had, so with *Boxer* there was a bit more pressure, but also we wanted to make something different. They were the first times we wrote songs on a piano and it opened things up creatively pretty fast for us as far as the different types of songs, like *Green Gloves* or *Start A War*, and then rock songs like *Mistaken For Strangers* and *Apartment Story*. The band established a pretty wide palette on that record."

"It's funny, I heard it the other day in Copenhagen in the Royal Opera House," says Aaron. "There was a listening event for *Sleep Well Beast*. They played *Boxer* on a $100,000 soundsystem. It was the first moment that I'd listened to it in many years and I was struck by the focus and cohesiveness of it and how it goes to so many different places. It dawned on me what we'd accomplished. We used to think of *Alligator* as the first record where we figured it out, but now sometimes I think maybe it's *Boxer*…"

With seven albums and sold-out shows at the 02 Arena, Sydney Opera House and New York's Barclays Center under their belt, while being touted by Glastonbury organiser Emily Eavis as future headliners, The National are uninterested in basking in the stultifying rays of self-congratulation. So what next? With each member now a father, living in disparate parts of the globe and with myriad individual projects competing for their attention, will there be an eighth National album?

"We're very aware that a band is a fragile thing," says Bryce. "Even with a band like ours that has existed a long time. We have a big asset in that there's family in the band, we have brothers, so there's a sense of permanence. We all realise the creative partnership is more powerful than anything we do separately. But it's hard to be in a collaborative band – you have to come in with one fifth of your ego, or you'll get hurt.

"There are times when it's like, 'Oh god, can we really keep doing this?'. Our greatest fear is repeating ourselves. We're so critical of our own work that I think the end will come when it feels like our own music has run its course. That's the litmus test." ●

THE NATIONAL ON FILM

A SKIN, A NIGHT
2008

Oblique, slow and arty, Vincent Moon's film captured the band in the grips of trying to finish their fourth album *Boxer*. Eschewing conventional documentary techniques, with dialogue at times inaudible, it nonetheless gets right to the heart of the album's genesis and is a fascinating, raw portrait of a band toiling to make the breakthrough.

MISTAKEN FOR STRANGERS
2013

This 2013 documentary follows Matt Berninger's down-on-his-luck filmmaker brother, Tom, as he's invited to join The National's crew on their world tour. His inevitable sacking results in a moving and hilarious movie, which Michael Moore hailed as "one of the best documentaries about a band I've ever seen".

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GOLDE

MC Taylor of Hiss Golden Messenger is an avid record collector, and he's drawn to albums that "perplex" him

NERA

Celebrated folk-rockers Hiss Golden Messenger have just released their ninth album, *Hallelujah Anyhow*. **Laura Barton** asks main man MC Taylor how the sounds and history of his adopted home of Durham, North Carolina, seep into his music…

It's the end of the summer vacation in Durham, North Carolina, and down the phone line, MC Taylor is juggling the roles of professional musicianship and fatherhood; in the distance, the sound of children playing, sudden shouts of laughter, pleas for lunch, and Taylor's voice, rising in stern admonishment: "Hey, no hitting!".

Taylor is best known as the driving force of the long-running folk-rock project Hiss Golden Messenger, and to be plunged into the heart of his home today in fact seems fitting; his new album, *Hallelujah Anyhow*, is a record of familial warmth and great richness, one that rails against darkness, and draws tightly on Taylor's musical community in North Carolina – Brad Cook and Phil Cook, Scott Hirsch, Josh Kaufman, Tift Merritt, Skylar Gudasz and John Paul White among them.

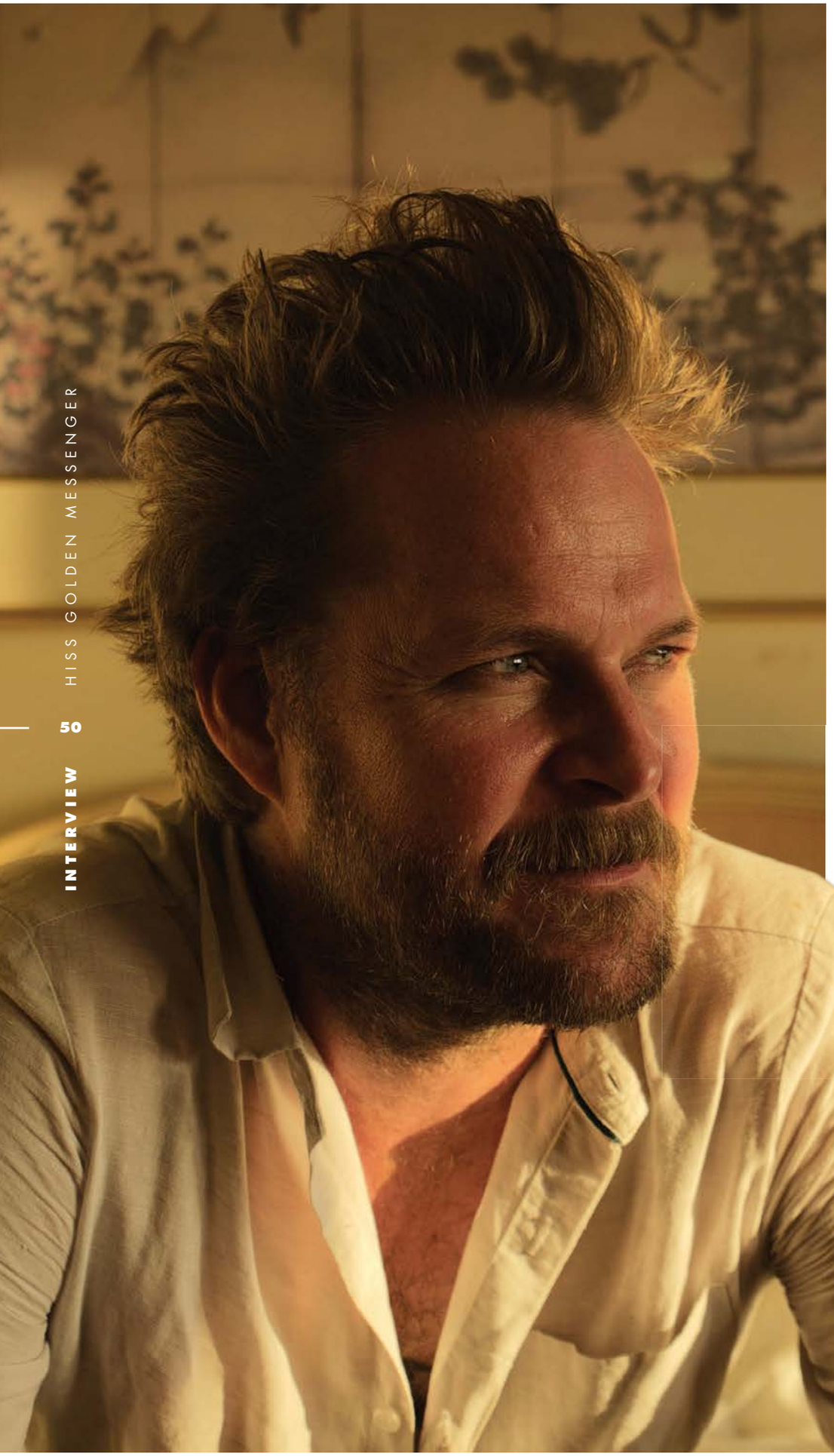
It's an album that "somehow tumbled out", Taylor says, in the months following the release of last year's *Heart Like A Levee*. "I started writing it in the winter of 2016," he remembers. "It was right in the middle of touring for *Heart Like A Levee*. But we didn't actually know that we were going to make a record until four or five months ago, when we thought, 'You know what would be really great? If we recorded all these songs and put a record out this Fall…'"

There was an urgency, he felt, to these songs, a need to get something said or addressed. "There was something going on that had me writing a lot when I was home," Taylor recalls. "Obviously, the [US] election had just happened. But this record is, for me personally, much bigger than that." He pauses. "Uhhhhm," he says softly. "Though it would be disingenuous to say this record is not a record of protest, I'm very hesitant to link it explicitly to things that have been happening politically," he continues after a moment. "Just because maybe what it is is that everything that has been going on in the world has given rise to or coincided with some existential issues that I think I need to deal with myself."

But what it does carry – whether political or personal – is a great swell of hope; a holding-on that carries through *Harder Rain*, *When The Wall Comes Down* and *Gulfport You've Been On My Mind*. "Yes I've seen darker things than night," he sings on the latter. "So give me the light."

"Hiss Golden Messenger music, my music, people talk about it as music that is hopeful," he says. "And I talk about it as music that is hopeful. I want it to be music that is hopeful. But I think a lot of that is me trying to direct that hope towards myself. I'm not absolutely convinced that I'm a carrier of hope all the time. I can be a pessimist myself, or a fatalist." Many times, Taylor says, he can be up on stage watching people sing along to the songs he has written, struck by the notion that the crowd has little idea of the solace this brings him – his words re-coloured by the communality of the experience. "It's as helpful to me as it is helpful to them," he says. "I need to find hope, too. I'm searching for that."

Hiss Golden Messenger are now nine albums deep, a steady, soft-gathering body



of work. "I'm working on this thing that I'm doing like it's a river," Taylor says. "I have made so many records now and this is a slow-building thing for me. If there were any overnight success at this point in my career, it would be absolutely shocking to me." Rather, he and his cohorts are spurred by a more spiritual impetus. "We are chasing something," he says. "I would be hard pressed to put a name to it or to articulate it, but there is a certain feeling, an emotional fullness that is part of this thing that we're doing."

SOUTHERN COMFORT

A project that began in 2007, when Taylor and musical collaborator Scott Hirsch relocated to Durham from California, leaving behind the West Coast and their days in hardcore punk band Ex-Ignota and indie-rock act The Court & Spark, Hiss Golden Messenger has long wedded itself to the American South. Taylor has been a diligent student of the region and its culture — *Heart Like A Levee*, for instance, grew out of a commission from Duke University to find a musical response to William Gedney's archived portraits of a mining camp in eastern Kentucky, taken in 1972. But beyond the scholarliness, in Hiss Golden Messenger's music there lies a humility and a reverence, a pace, perhaps, that is palpably, instinctively Southern.

It's interesting that Taylor should make music so intimately entwined with a place so far from his own beginnings in Irvine, Southern California. Irvine, a planned city in Orange County, is somewhere to which he feels no such devotion – and whenever he returns now, he finds it hard, he says, "to recognise the emotional tenor of that place".

A DROP OF GOLDEN SUN

MC Taylor chooses a special record from his collection…

We ask Taylor to select just one record from his vast collection that holds particular resonance, an unenviable task perhaps, but he happily obliges.

"I've pulled out this record that is my favourite Sun Ra record – *Sound Of Joy*," he says. "I'm a huge fan of American big-band jazz groups from the 30s, 40s and 50s, and I absolutely adore Duke Ellington – I think Duke Ellington is the high-water mark of harmony in the United States. And Sun Ra definitely comes out of that tradition, and there's that feeling, a sort of Ellingtonian feeling, to *Sound Of Joy*. He hadn't gone totally to space yet. And I really enjoy those other Sun Ra records, too. But there's something about *Sound Of Joy* that's so beautiful and listenable."

He sounds faintly baffled. "When I go there I always end up thinking it's strange that I come from this place," he says. "I'm looking for something familiar, or for something that I understand in an intuitive, in-the-blood way, and I have a hard time finding that. And then I get a little anxious because I feel like this is the place that I come from, this is the place that I knew as a kid, and I don't recognise it in my bones like some people I know do about the place that they come from."

What he found in Durham was a sense of belonging. "Part of my music is about rootedness," he says. "It's about home, and it's about understanding the nuance of the place that you come from." He relishes the community of Durham, the neighbourliness, a quality that seems to rise up in his music in the dressed-down friendliness of his songs; songs that feel as if they know every inch and back road, that bear with them a sense of long-worn, easily carried history.

RHYTHM AND BLUES

Taylor's voice lights up when he talks about the South. "There's a certain way the colours pop out, and a certain way that flavours exist and sounds exist here, and that feels different to me than other places," he says. "The things that I loved, even as a kid, if you trace them back to their roots, they were in some part of the South. And why that is, I don't know – maybe at that time there was an otherness that I felt drawn to as a kid." He moved there, eventually, "because I had reached a point where I felt that if I was going to try to understand the thing that I loved I needed to actually be here".

And the South does take some understanding. "History is not so deep beneath the surface here, like it can be in other parts of the country," he explains. "There's a complicated legacy of race, class and culture here that people recognise and grapple with. But the rest of our country has the same issues, in different ways."

That history shows up musically, too, of course. "I'm definitely a student of American music," Taylor says. "So when I think of the rhythms that are the musical building blocks for what Hiss Golden Messenger does, for instance, those rhythms all come from the South." He lists some

"HISTORY ISN'T SO DEEP BENEATH THE SURFACE HERE, LIKE IT CAN BE ELSEWHERE"

of the region's musical layers: "We have Hi Records, Stax Records, Goldwax, Sun Ra comes from Alabama," he says. "Not only do we have a deep sense of swinging rhythm but we have jazz, we have blues, people like Blind Boy Fuller and Reverend Gary Davis lived in Durham; fingerpickers like Etta Baker and Elizabeth Cotten were from within 75 miles of here. And there's something really heavy about that."

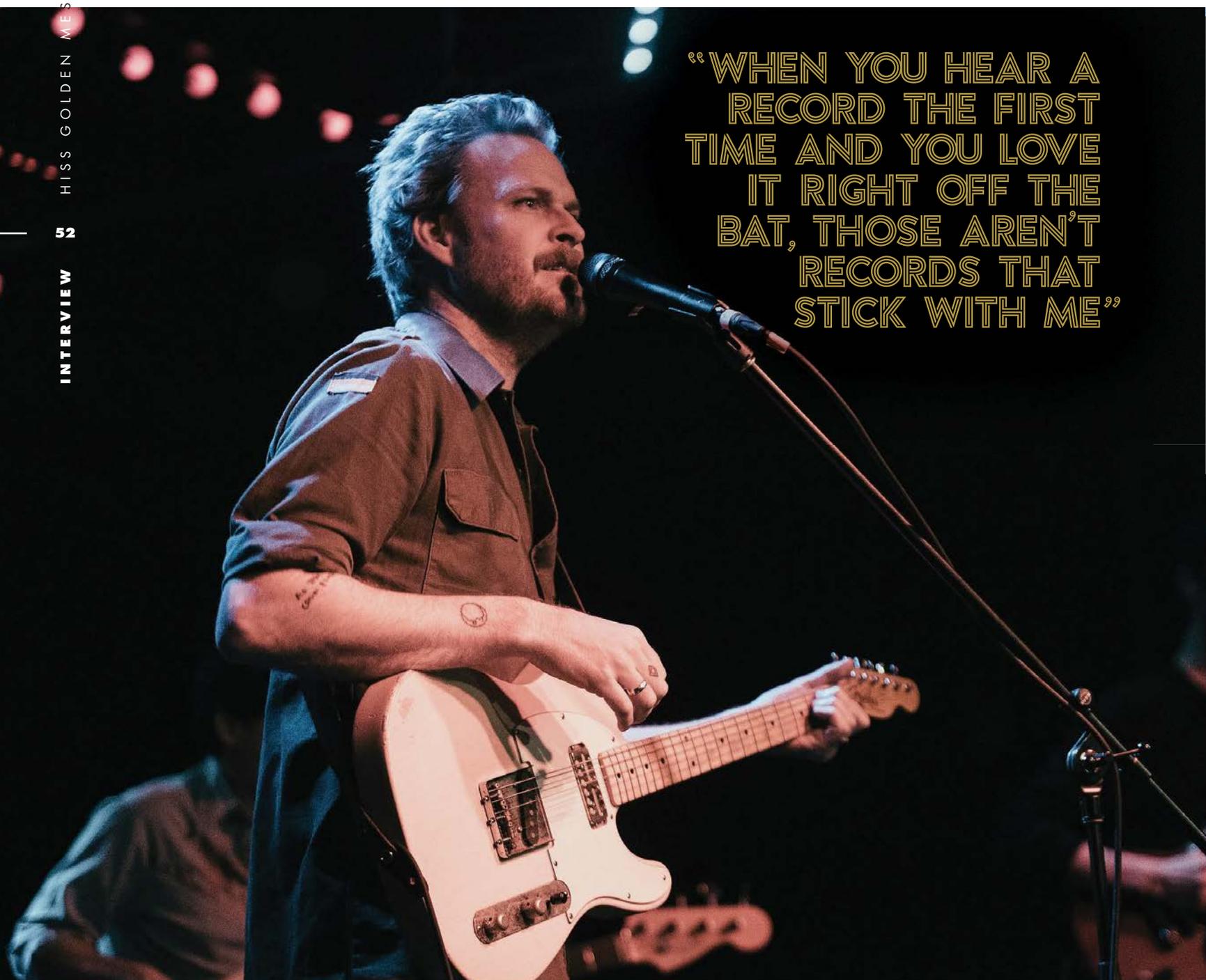
HOUSE MUSIC

And at times, for Taylor, the region's musical heritage seems to lie deeper yet: "The difference of an accent, the way that insects sound, the way that the tree frogs chant, those are all part of the rhythm here," he says. "There is a correspondence between the way that Al Jackson Jr's hi-hat sounds and the way that cicadas sound."

Taylor's passion for American music – indeed for music in general – is a glorious, untempered thing, and to sit in conversation with him for an hour or so is to be carried on his enthusiasm. His home, he says, is filled with records; an open-plan house in which the main record player sits at the very heart, in the upstairs living room: "So I can be playing records and that's basically the soundtrack for the rest of the house and upstairs, where everybody's hanging out." And while the bulk of his collection lives downstairs in his office, "the records that I play a lot all stay up here".

He takes a moment to draw out some of the records that have shaped him. "A big one for me, one that opened my head up to thinking about rhythm and really opened my world up in terms of looking at all the genres, was a record called *Paid In Full* by Eric B. & Rakim," he says. "Maybe I was 10 when I heard that. And that felt like a time in my upbringing where kids in my friend group, for some reason, were deciding that they had to pledge allegiance to either rap or heavy metal. And many of my friends were choosing heavy metal. But to me, heavy metal sounded so corny and rhythmless. And when I heard that Eric B. & Rakim record, I didn't know what it was, I wasn't totally unfamiliar with rap, but the way they assembled that, I didn't understand quite how they'd done it. And Rakim as a rapper was just so commanding and confident, and he was young and he just felt like he owned the world – it felt like that to me."

It was shortly after this that Taylor first heard Public Enemy's *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*: "Which is incredibly dense and not as immediately



listenable as the Eric B. & Rakim record, or honestly, any of the rap records that were coming out at that time," he says. "But that Public Enemy record was a really deep one – I spent years and years studying that record. When you hear a record the first time and you love it right off the bat, in my life, those aren't records that stick with me. I generally am looking for records that perplex me. And that's still a record that I can put on to this day and feel like I am so amazed that these young guys made it."

A NEW CALLING

Today, Taylor buys records "all the time". His last purchase was a double LP by Betty Harris, *The Lost Queen Of New Orleans Soul*, that Soul Jazz put out last year. "It's Allen Toussaint production and The Meters are the band. It's really beautiful." A recent trip to Mississippi Records in Portland, Oregon, led him to a collection of cumbia music from Columbia, and a compilation of gospel songs from Detroit. "I feel like these days, the section that I go to first in record stores is the gospel section," he says. "There is a blending of rhythmic richness and devotion to gospel that appeals to me. I come at spirit in my own music from a different angle – there's kind of a quest within Hiss Golden Messenger music to find my place in the spiritual spectrum, but with gospel music, there's already a dedication there."

Another recent purchase, this time from a record store in Portland, Maine, was the reissue of Lal & Mike Waterson's *Bright Phoebus*. "That's one of my favourite records ever," he says. "It goes back to that thing that's been a refrain for me, which is that I don't totally get the form of it, I can't totally get my arms around it. It's not a record I can put on all the time, because it kind of demands attention in a way that a lot of records don't, but there's a pureness of soul and a rawness to their voices there that really gets me, and it's a strange kind of witchy record."

On that same trip to Maine, Taylor and his wife took their eight-year-old son Elijah to see Wilco. "And he was just absolutely in love with it," Taylor says. "He sat totally rapt for the whole concert, which was like two-and-a-half hours. And that was a really big moment, that was a new thing, in terms of the way that music stretches out in my life and across generations: to see my son watching and enjoying this band that has soundtracked so much of my life."

Taylor's favourite Wilco record will always be *A Ghost Is Born*. "Because that record came into my life when I needed the guidance and emotion that it could offer me," he says.

"But Wilco is the model for what I feel an American band can and should be in the 21st century. If you want people to pay attention to your band that features guitars and a bunch of white men, you have to be doing something that feels real and genuine and emotional and wide open. And Wilco does that, and that's definitely what I strive for," Taylor reflects. "I'm under no illusions that I'm doing something that hasn't been done before, I'm just trying to do it really good." ●

MC Taylor playing Saturn Birmingham, in Birmingham, Alabama

THE ESSENTIAL

Country

Put aside any preconceptions of rednecks and rhinestones, of cowboy boots and 10-gallon hats – country is the folk music of America. **Gary Tipp** asks: "Are you ready for the country?"

Country music's origins can be traced back to the ballads, folk music and popular songs of the English, Scottish and Irish settlers of the Appalachian Mountains and other parts of the rural South. With the migration of many Southern rural workers searching for employment during the Great Depression, country music moved into new areas and was exposed to new influences, such as blues and gospel.

The appeal of country, to this day, lies in its plaintive storytelling songs, which have evolved into many different styles.

It was a market based mostly on 78s and 45s until World War II and beyond, so our Essential list starts in 1952 at the dawning of country's album age, with one of its most iconic stars, the talented, tragic Hank Williams. Honky-tonk Hank's music was stripped down, raw and linked with barrooms and hard drinking. Stellar artists such as Ernest Tubb, Kitty Wells, Lefty Frizzell and, latterly, George Jones were all practitioners of the sound.

Bluegrass was a scene that ran parallel with honky tonk: it's played on the traditional instruments of the South – guitar, fiddle, banjo and mandolin – and was often used to accompany rural dancing. Bill Monroe is accepted as the Father Of Bluegrass, and the style he developed remains popular to this day.

With honky tonk fading in the late 50s and rockabilly a passing fad, country music fell under the spell of the Nashville Sound. Driven by strings and centred on the vocal performance, it turned country music into a multi-million dollar industry.

OUTLAW COUNTRY

Meanwhile, out in California during the mid 1960s, the Bakersfield Sound was developing. It fused elements of hardcore honky tonk and Western swing into a hard, driving, rocking music with electric guitars. Buck Owens and Merle Haggard were among its forerunners.

With Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and a willing convert in Johnny Cash at its helm, the Outlaw movement took hold in the 1970s as a reaction to Nashville's smoothed-out sounds. Country pop took over in the 1980s and was followed by Neocountry and Neotraditionalist country. All of which goes to show country is multidimensional, forever reinventing itself for the sake of the song.

Our selection of country's most essential records chronologically spans these genres. We try to look at the prices of UK first pressings. However, this means there is the occasional gap, as some of the albums didn't receive an official release over here. On those occasions, we've directed you to the US first pressing.

40 MOANIN' THE BLUES

HANK WILLIAMS (1952)

The long-gone Hank Williams is the defining figure of country music. His immense talent as a songwriter and performer, coupled with his troubled personal life, created the template for all those who have followed him. *Moanin' The Blues*, his second album, is packed with killer hits and has more than survived the test of time (unlike poor Hank).

Rarest (UK release, 1959) **£50**
Latest Out of press

39 COUNTRY HIT PARADE

KITTY WELLS (1956)

The Nashville-born Wells was country's first female star and, as such, the original Queen Of Country. Her reputation was made at the Grand Ole Opry but, ironically, the song that sent her into superstardom (*It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels*) was deemed too risqué to be performed there. Even putting its historical importance aside, *Country Hit Parade* remains a timeless slice of classic country.

Rarest 1956 Decca (US import) **£50**
Latest 1982 Stetson **£25**

38 WITH HIS HOT AND BLUE GUITAR

JOHNNY CASH (1957)

Not only was this Cash's debut release, it was also the first full-length album to be released by Memphis' legendary Sun label. The great man's voice commands every track, while the distinctive 'boom-chicka' rhythm propels them further down the line. *Cry! Cry! Cry!*, *I Walk The Line* and *Folsom Prison Blues* are all here.

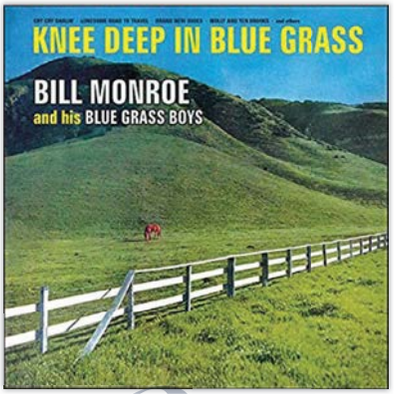
Rarest 1957 Sun (US import) **£150**,
1959 London (1st UK) **£90**
Latest 2015 DOL **£20**

37 THE DADDY OF 'EM ALL

ERNEST TUBB (1957)

The original Texas Troubadour was a singing, songwriting, guitar-playing country-music pioneer who cut his first single way back in 1936. *The Daddy Of 'Em All*, his first long-player, was worth the wait and successfully showcases his distinctive honky-tonk sound. The Ernest Tubb Record Shop can still be found on the main strip in Nashville to this day.

Rarest 1958 Brunswick **£45**
Latest 1980 Stetson **£15**



36 KNEE DEEP IN BLUE GRASS

BILL MONROE AND HIS BLUE GRASS BOYS (1958)

The mandolin-playing Monroe is known as the 'Father Of Bluegrass' and is forever associated with his home state of Kentucky; he famously wrote a song about its blue moon. Backed by his bluegrass boys, *Knee Deep In Blue Grass* was Monroe's debut album – though he had been a star performer on the country circuit for many, many years before its release.

Rarest 1958 Brunswick **£50**
Latest 1980 Stetson **£30**

35 THE ONE AND ONLY LEFTY FRIZZELL

LEFTY FRIZZELL (1959)

Frizzell is one of country's most celebrated vocalists, with his effortless style holding an influential sway over artists such as George Jones, Willie Nelson, Merle Haggard and even Roy Orbison. The quintessential honky tonker, this crowd-pleasing collection includes the smash hit *If You've Got The Money I've Got The Time*. Lefty was yet another early country star lost to booze at an early age.

Rarest 1959 CBS **£30**
Latest 2015 Southern Routes **£15**

34 SATAN IS REAL

THE LOUVIN BROTHERS (1959)

There was more than a touch of fire and brimstone in the country-gospel music served up by The Louvin Brothers (aka Charlie and Ira Loudermilk) and their 1959 magnum opus is a case in point. *Satan Is Real* not only features the glorious close harmonies that were the siblings' stock-in-trade, but also has one of the genre's great album covers.

Rarest 1959 Capital Records (US release) **£60**
Latest 2015 Light In The Attic (US import) **£20**

33 SHOWCASE
PATSY CLINE (1961)

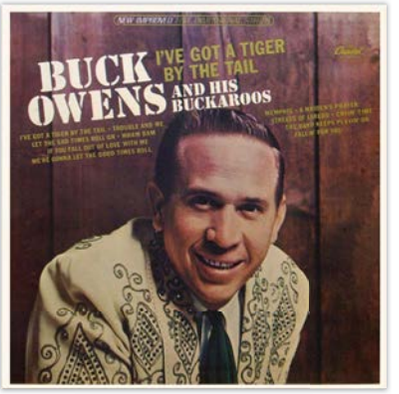
Along with Kitty Wells, Patsy helped to blaze a trail for female artists in country music. She was adored for the pure emotion and heartbreak delivered in her wonderful vocals. Patsy released only three albums in her lifetime: *Showcase* spent a full five months on the LP charts and features the classic *Crazy*, as well as *I Fall To Pieces*. She perished in a plane crash, aged 30.

Rarest 1961 Brunswick **£25**
Latest 2015 Waxtime **£15**

32 MODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY AND WESTERN MUSIC
RAY CHARLES (1962)

Charles took a break from R&B and helped bring country closer to the mainstream with this landmark covers LP. *Modern Sounds…* was a great success and, as Charles put it: "You take country music, you take black music, you got the same goddamn thing exactly." It features versions of two Hank Williams songs (*You Win Again* and *Hey, Good Lookin'*).

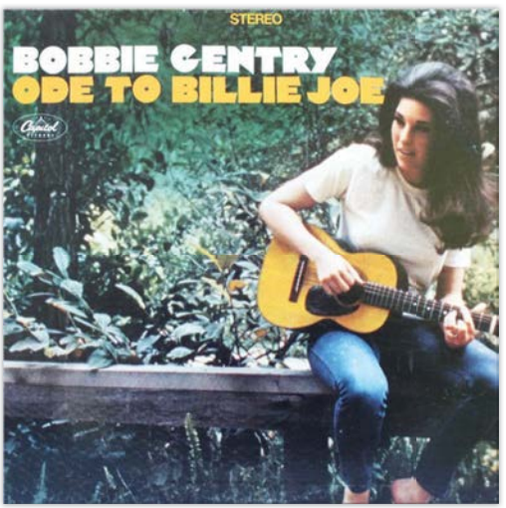
Rarest 1962 HMV (mono) **£25**
Latest 2015 Rumble **£15**



31 I'VE GOT A TIGER BY THE TAIL
BUCK OWENS AND HIS BUCKAROOS (1965)

The Bakersfield Sound emerged in the 1960s as a reaction to the ultra-slick productions coming out of Nashville – and among its prime movers was Buck Owens (with Merle Haggard close by). Buck's band, the Buckaroos, featured twin Fender Telecasters that gave the album its distinctively twangy, highly influential honky-tonk sound.

Rarest 1965 Capitol **£30**
Latest 1995 Sundazed **£15**



30 ODE TO BILLIE JOE
BOBBIE GENTRY (1967)

Often dismissed as merely a one-hit wonder due to the huge crossover success of the title track of this her debut album, the Mississippi-born Gentry was, in fact, a classy songwriter and the possessor of a seriously smoky voice. She occupied the territory where country meets blue-eyed soul; remind us, why did Billie Joe McAllister jump off the Tallahatchie Bridge?

Rarest 1967 Capitol **£20**
Latest 2010 Pure Pleasure **£10**

29 AT FOLSOM PRISON
JOHNNY CASH (1968)

As sure as day is light and night is dark, Johnny Cash is country music's biggest star. He wrote the title track while in the Air Force in 1954 and recorded the definitive album live in the prison that bears its name all those years later. Cool, compassionate, spiritual, human, the record encapsulates the everyman appeal of the Man In Black.

Rarest 1968 CBS **£25-£30**
Latest 2017 Columbia **£25**

28 FIST CITY
LORETTA LYNN (1968)

Lynn is, famously, a coal miner's daughter born in Butcher Hollow, Kentucky. Married at 14, she was a mother of four before she even started performing. One of the most prominent female country icons, her tumultuous life proved to be a deep well for her fabulous songwriting talent. *Fist City* is no different, and rings true with her trademark honesty and heartfelt delivery.

Rarest 1968 MCA **£30**
Latest Out of press

27 MAMA TRIED
MERLE HAGGARD (1968)

Haggard is country music's most authentic rebel and was sat in the (captive) audience during Johnny Cash's *At San Quentin* live prison concert album. After his release, he became an important figure on the Bakersfield scene. *Mama Tried*, one of his strongest early albums, is a melancholy mix of self-penned blue-collar confessionals and classic country covers.

Rarest 1969 Capitol **£30**
Latest 2017 Capitol **(US import)**

26 GALVESTON
GLEN CAMPBELL (1969)

Arkansas-born Campbell started out as an LA session guitarist and ended up a hugely successful solo artist and sometime movie star. *Galveston* is one of his most consistent country-pop albums and features a trademark Jimmy Webb number as the title track. Webb's *Where's The Playground Susie* was another hit off the album.

Rarest 1969 Ember **£15**
Latest 2017 Capitol **£20**

Country Pioneers

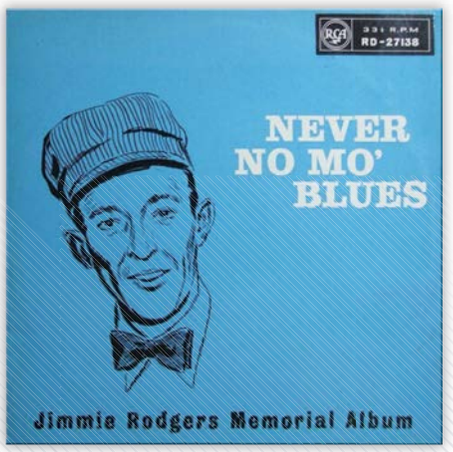
Let's cast our net back to some of the early pioneers of country music – artists recording in the days before LPs were even conceived.

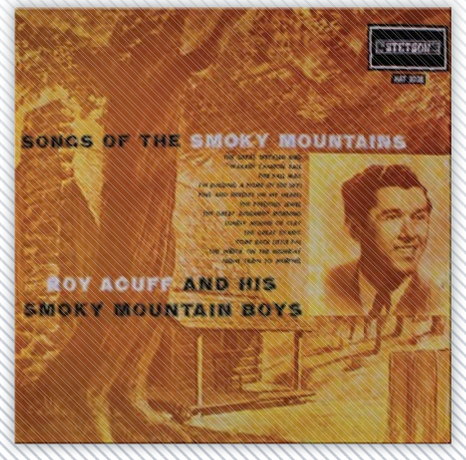
Jimmie Rodgers was among the very first and hugely influenced artists such as Merle Haggard, Hank Snow and Lefty Frizzell. Rodgers died in 1933 and isn't well served on vinyl by 'Best Of's. Try tracking down a copy of *Never No Mo' Blues*.

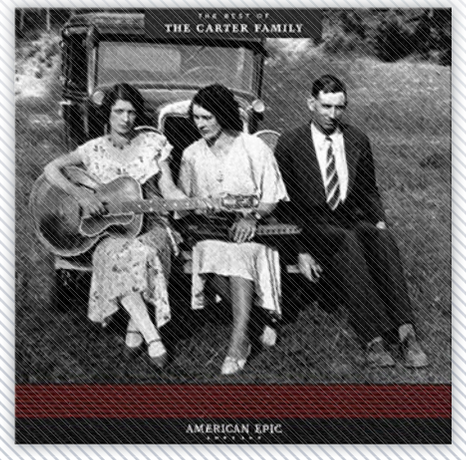
The Carter Family, formed in 1927, are the most profoundly influential group in country history: their simple harmonies and guitar style set the blueprint. The original incarnation of the group featured Sara Carter on lead vocals, husband AP singing harmony and sister-in-law Maybelle (June's mum) on guitar. A vinyl compilation linked to the *American Epic* documentary series has recently been released on Third Man Records (TMR 460 – £18).

Bob Wills, the King Of Western Swing, along with his band, the Texas Playboys, both popularised and redefined the genre. A Record Store Day release of his radio recordings, *Transcriptions*, is available (Real Gone Music – £20).

That leaves Roy Acuff, the early innovator who's often given the credit for moving country music on from its early string band/hoedown format to become the star-singer-based format we still know and love today. You can find him on record by tracking down *Songs Of The Smoky Mountains* (Stetson HAT 3038 – £35).







EARLY YEARS

25 KRISTOFFERSON
KRIS KRISTOFFERSON (1970)

Kristofferson's anti-establishment leanings meant he was always an outsider when it came to Nashville's inner echelons, but made his presence felt by the sheer force of his songwriting. He led the way in composing serious, reflective songs that weren't the slightest bit afflicted with country's trademark showbiz affectations. The album was later reissued as *Me And Bobby McGee* to capitalise on the success of Janis Joplin's cover.

Rarest 1970 Monument **£13**
Latest 2013 Music On Vinyl **£15**

24 COAT OF MANY COLOURS
DOLLY PARTON (1971)

For many years, Dolly was known in Nashville as Porter Wagoner's duet partner. The release of this album firmly changed the perception and launched the larger-than-life singer on a career path of her own. *Coat Of Many Colours* also established Parton's reputation as a talented songwriter, with the folksy title track adopted as her signature tune.

Rarest 1971 RCA (US import) **£20**
Latest 2016 RCA **£18**

23 WILL THE CIRCLE BE UNBROKEN
NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND (1972)

The circle in question was the link between the old and the new country acts that united together to appear on this classic triple album. Somehow, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band were able to entice a stellar roster of folk, bluegrass and country legends to play with them, including Bill Monroe, Roy Acuff, 'Mother' Maybelle Carter and Doc Watson. The result was six sides of vinyl beloved by all generations.

Rarest 1972 United Artist **£30**
Latest 2002 Capitol **£20**

22 SHOTGUN WILLIE
WILLIE NELSON (1973)

Willie spent much of the 1960s writing smash hits for other country artists, including, most famously, *Crazy* for Patsy Cline. Come the 1970s and Willie transformed into a weed-loving, counterculture outlaw, recording a string of classic albums all of his own. *Shotgun Willie* found Nelson at a new, laid-back peak, while subsequent releases *Phases And Stages* and *Red Headed Stranger* are both equally essential additions to your collection.

Rarest 1973 Atlantic **£40**
Latest 2009 Atlantic **£25**

21 HONKY TONK HEROES
WAYLON JENNINGS (1973)

Ever the renegade, Jennings actively rebelled against the Music City's strings-laden 'Countrypolitan' sound and fought to wrestle creative control back into the arms of the artist. 1973's *Honky Tonk Heroes* is proof the battle was worth it; the album spills over with Waylon's defiant outlaw attitude and sounds all the better for it. Countrypolitan it ain't!

Rarest 1973 RCA **£35-£40**
Latest 2013 RCA **£20**

20 THE GRAND TOUR
GEORGE JONES (1974)

Starting off as a no-nonsense honky tonker and evolving into one of Nashville's greatest balladeers, George Jones possesses one of country music's finest voices. Teaming up with legendary producer Billy Sherrill, *The Grand Tour* was the perfect showcase for Jones' mighty interpretive powers and you'll have to go a long way to hear a better vocal delivery than on the album's ultra-forlorn title track.

Rarest 1974 Epic (US only) **£35**
Latest 2007 Sony **£20**

19 PIECES OF THE SKY
EMMYLOU HARRIS (1975)

After her singing partnership with Gram Parsons was abruptly ended by the latter's fatal overdose, country songbird Emmylou signed to a major label and delivered *Pieces Of The Sky*. The album is a plaintive collection of pitch-perfect covers, with the one heartfelt original, *Boulder To Birmingham*, a touching tribute to her former partner in song.

Rarest 1975 Reprise **£20**
Latest 2014 Reprise **£15**

18 OLD NO. 1
GUY CLARK (1975)

According to legend, Guy Clark was such a perfectionist that it took him two years to select the songs for this classic progressive country album. His pernickety approach paid dividends and every track on this influential release is killer. Recorded at RCA Studios in Nashville, it includes two of his greatest songs, *L.A. Freeway* and *Desperados Waiting For A Train*.

Rarest 1975 RCA Victor **£35**
Latest 2016 4 Men With Beards (US import) **£20**

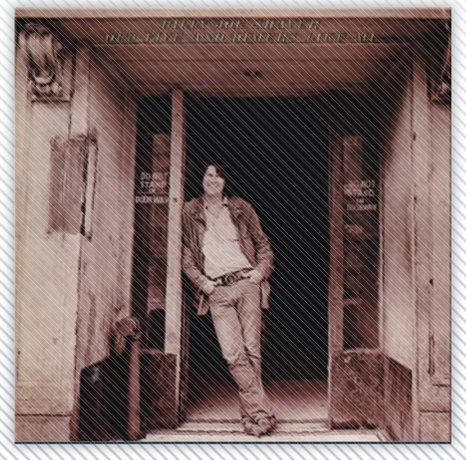
A Breed Apart: More Outlaws

Here are some more Outlaw country bad-asses to take note of. David Allan Coe is the outlaw's outlaw and spent time in prison for an impressively varied roster of illegal activities. When not behind bars, he created some great songs, including *Longhaired Redneck* and *Take This Job And Shove It* – a hit for fellow renegade, Johnny Paycheck. Coe's debut LP, *Penitentiary Blues* (1969 SSS – £40), is well worth hunting down.

This brings us to the aforementioned Paycheck, whose outlaw credentials include shooting a man in a bar in Hillsboro, Ohio. His first Outlaw album was called *11 Months And 29 Days* (1976 Epic £30), alluding to his sentence for passing a bad cheque.

Billy Joe Shaver's 1973 album *Old Five And Dimers Like Me* (Monument £20-£25) is an Outlaw classic. Shaver was also arrested for shooting a man in a bar, this time in Lorena, Texas.

Tompall (christened Tom Paul) Glaser was a key member of the Outlaw movement in the 1970s, despite never actually shooting anybody in a bar. Tompall wrote many hits for other country artists, but never really struck it big on his own. His moment came when he featured heavily on the *Wanted! The Outlaws* compilation with Waylon, Willie and Jessi Colter (1976 RCA – £15).



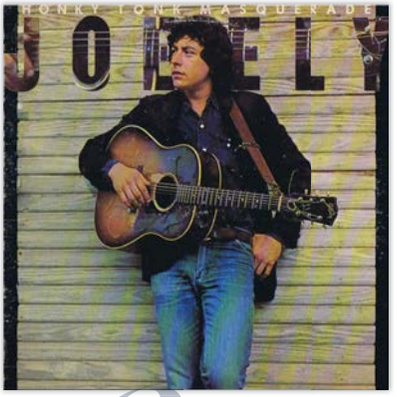
THE OUTLAWS

17

GOLDEN RING
GEORGE JONES AND TAMMY WYNETTE (1976)

Their tempestuous and very public marriage ended in the inevitable *D-I-V-O-R-C-E* in 1975, but such was the public's appetite for George and Tammy that they continued to release records together into the early 1980s. Needless to say, *Golden Ring* is an album full of raw emotion and no shortage of tearjerkers – it's one of the great breakup albums.

Rarest 1976 Epic **£20**
Latest Out of press



16

HONKY TONK MASQUERADE
JOE ELY (1978)

Country music doesn't confine itself solely to Tennessee, as maverick Texan singer-songwriter Joe Ely was to ably testify. *Honky Tonk Masquerade* was Ely's second album on MCA; a career highpoint, it can be filed under 'Progressive Country'. A mate of Joe Strummer, Ely sang backing vocals on The Clash hit *Should I Stay Or Should I Go*.

Rarest 1978 MCA **£25**
Latest 2007 Universal **£10**

15

STRAIT FROM THE HEART
GEORGE STRAIT (1982)

With the Outlaw movement out on its feet, along came the Neotraditionalists, with the perpetually hat-wearing George Strait at the helm. Albums such as *Strait From The Heart* saw the Texan singer-songwriter inject a fresh energy into the established honky-tonk template, and become the newly crowned King Of Country in the process.

Rarest 1982 MCA (US import) **£25**
Latest Out of press

Country Compilations

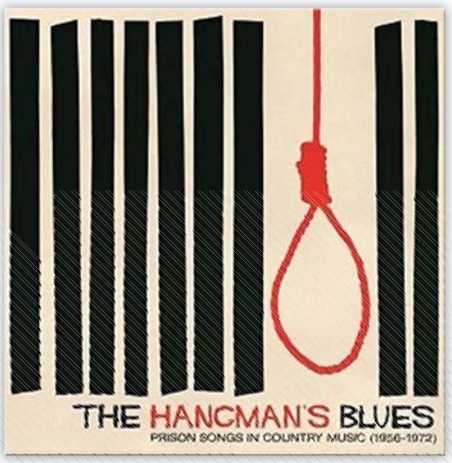
Dig in the crates of any UK charity shop and you'll find limitless swathes of country compilations, but they may not all be as good as this recent batch.

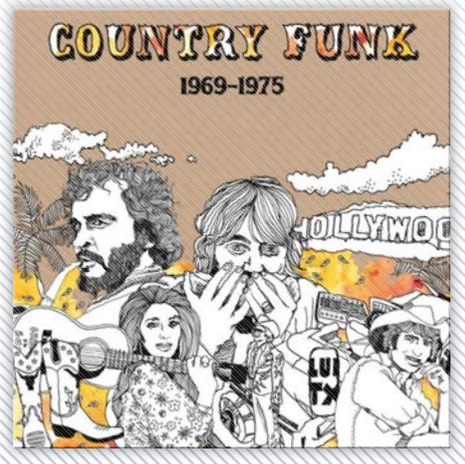
The recently broadcast *American Epic* series of documentaries for BBC's *Arena* spawned a whole load of albums on Jack White's Third Man label.

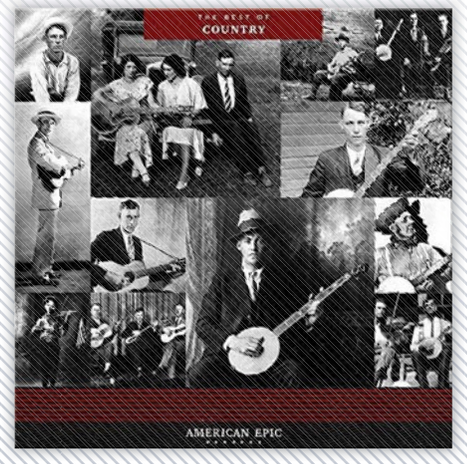
Among them is *American Epic: The Best Of Country* featuring early champions of the genre such as the Carter Family, Uncle Dave Macon, the Massey Family and Jimmie Rodgers (Third Man £18).

Light In The Attic's *Country Funk 1969–1975* double album takes the swamp to Nashville and includes Bobbie Gentry, Tony Joe White, Mac Davis and Jim Ford (Light In The Attic £35).

Soul Jazz Records is better known for reggae reissues, but its *Country Soul Sisters* series charts the rise of female country singers from 1956 to 1979 across two volumes. It includes legends such as Dolly, Loretta, Tammy and Kitty, and some songbirds on the fringes of Nashville (Nancy Sinatra, Linda Ronstadt and Cher – Soul Jazz £25). Our final choice is a fascinating oddity. *The Hangman's Blues: Prison Songs In Country Music* explores the early-60s resurgence of the prison ballad and features Porter Wagoner, Marty Robbins and Bill Carter (Iron Mountain Analogue Research £25).







COMPILATIONS

14 HIGHWAYMAN
THE HIGHWAYMEN (1985)

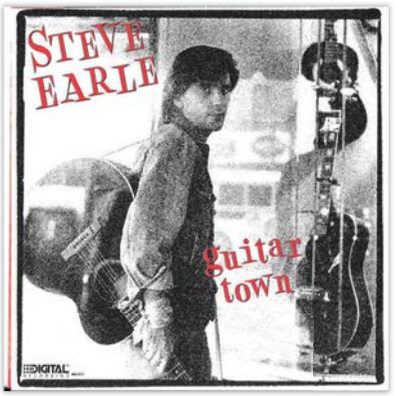
Any band that includes Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings and Kris Kristofferson in its line-up is entitled to call itself a country supergroup. The stellar outlaw foursome's debut album, *Highwayman*, actually managed to equal the sum of all parts; highlights included memorable versions of Guy Clark's *Desperados Waiting For A Train* and Jimmy Webb's title track.

Rarest 1985 CBS **£30**
Latest 2017 Columbia **£20**

13 STORMS OF LIFE
RANDY TRAVIS (1986)

Born Randy Traywick in North Carolina, the lanky Travis is associated with the Neotraditionalist movement of the mid 80s. *Storms Of Life*, his debut album, showcased his style as a crooner sculpted from the Lefty Frizzell and George Jones mould. It went on to sell over four million copies, and established Travis as a bona-fide country star.

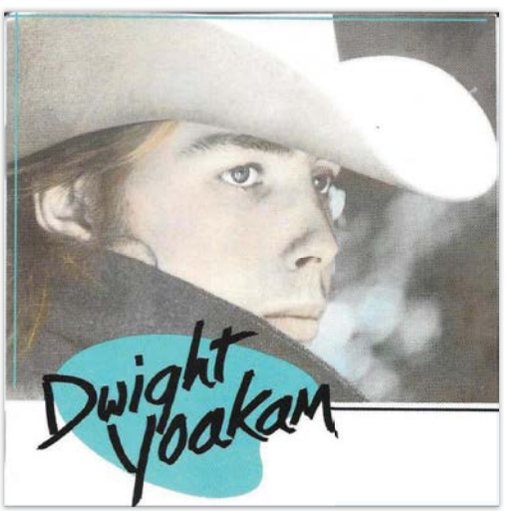
Rarest 1986 Warner Bros **£25**
Latest 2011 Warner Bros *(US import)* **£20**



12 GUITAR TOWN
STEVE EARLE (1986)

Guitar Town was Steve Earle's major-label debut, but it was no overnight success for the Texan-raised singer-songwriter, who had been plugging away off and on at Nashville's outer edges since the mid 70s. The young Earle was full of swagger, among other substances, and his amped-up honky-tonk anthems and sassy lyrics meant his appeal crossed over seamlessly to a rock audience.

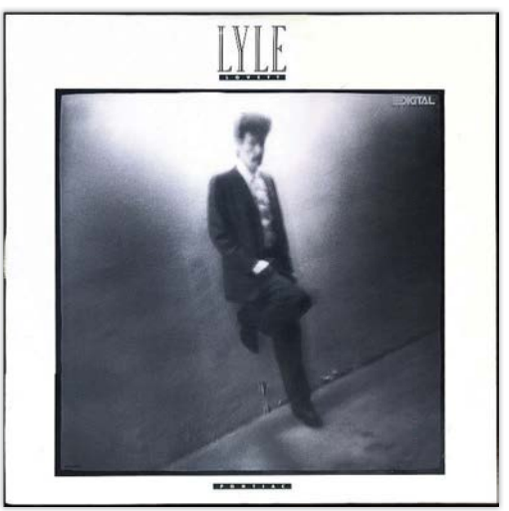
Rarest 1986 MCA **£25**
Latest 2016 MCA **£15**



11 GUITARS, CADILLACS ETC., ETC.
DWIGHT YOAKAM (1986)

Kentucky-born Yoakam played stripped-down, hardcore honky tonk to a rock audience, opening shows for bands such as X, Los Lobos and The Blasters. His live reputation soon led to a recording contract and debut album, *Guitars, Cadillacs Etc., Etc.* was an immediate smash. His modern approach to the Bakersfield Sound appealed as much to mainstream rock fans as it did the traditional country heartland.

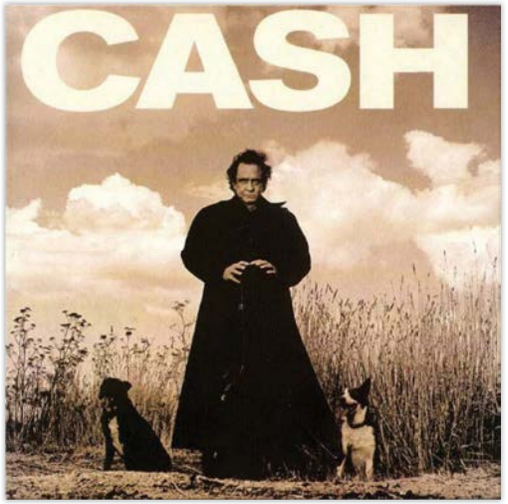
Rarest 1986 Reprise **£20**
Latest 2006 Rhino **£15**



10 PONTIAC
LYLE LOVETT (1987)

Lyle Lovett's sophisticated and idiosyncratic approach to writing country songs is nowhere better showcased than on his second album, *Pontiac*. From Southern gospel to Western swing, from country blues to Nashville pop, the former Mr Julia Roberts lovingly subverts each subgenre to create something of his own. Opening track *If I Had A Boat* is a Lovett classic.

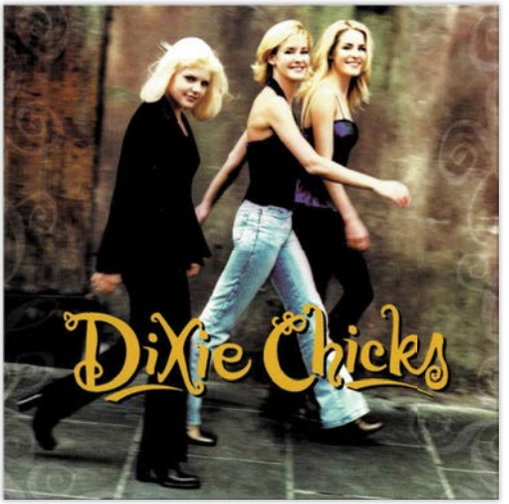
Rarest 1987 MCA **£20**
Latest 1989 Curb **£15**



9 AMERICAN RECORDINGS
JOHNNY CASH (1994)

With the considerable help of producer Rick Rubin, *American Recordings* saw Johnny Cash entrance a whole new generation of listeners. The back-to-basics album zoned in on Cash's innate ability as an interpreter of songs and, of course, his weathered yet still wonderful voice. The set includes a cover of former son-in-law Nick Lowe's *The Beast In Me*.

Rarest 1994 American Recordings **£35**
Latest 2014 American Recordings **£18**



8 WIDE OPEN SPACES
DIXIE CHICKS (1998)

Before being swallowed up in controversy following their open criticism of the war in Iraq, the Dixie Chicks were one of country music's biggest-selling acts. With its neo-rootsy approach combining sweetly with a radio-friendly pop sensibility, major-label debut *Wide Open Spaces* showcases the band's appeal perfectly. You'll not find it in George Bush's record collection.

Rarest 1998 Monument **£30**
Latest 2016 Monument **£20**

7 THE MOUNTAIN
STEVE EARLE AND THE DEL MCCOURY BAND (1999)

Country bad boy Steve Earle and bluegrass legend Del McCoury pay their musical tribute to Bill Monroe and bring out the best in each other at the same time. Earle wrote all the songs here, and demonstrates what a versatile and talented craftsman he is, while McCoury's ace ensemble swings with rhythmic abandon. Emmylou Harris and Iris DeMent make welcome appearances as guest vocalists.

Rarest 1999 Grapevine **£30**
latest 2009 New West **£20**

6 O BROTHER, WHERE ART THOU?
VARIOUS ARTISTS (2000)

The soundtrack album to the Coen Brother's fantastic Depression-era version of Homer's *Odyssey* is a thing of beauty in its own right. Producer T Bone Burnett recreates the sound of early-30s Mississippi with pitch-perfect contributions from Alison Krauss, Gillian Welch, Emmylou Harris and bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley. Some great performances, but the songs are the real stars here.

Rarest 2000 Mercury **£25**
Latest 2015 Universal **£25**

5 VAN LEAR ROSE
LORETTA LYNN (2004)

Jack White coaxed Loretta back into the studio and, taking on the production duties, he managed to breathe fresh air into the living legend's performance. The revitalised Lynn wrote all the songs on the album and sounds as full of sass as ever. Among the highlights is *Portland, Oregon*, a raucous artist-and-producer duet, with both giving nothing less than their all.

Rarest 2004 Interscope **£40**
Latest 2016 Third Man (US import) **£20**

4 BLACK CADILLAC
ROSANNE CASH (2006)

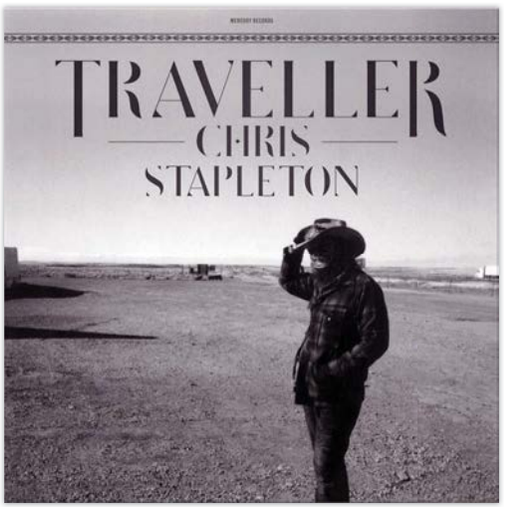
Rosanne Cash somehow managed to step out of the considerable shadow of her father to be recognised as a fearless songwriter and talented recording artist. *Black Cadillac* was her first release after the deaths of her father, stepmother (June Carter) and mother (Vivian Liberto). Understandably, the album is mournful and reflective, but it's also poetic and totally uplifting at the same time.

Latest 2006 Capitol £20

3 METAMODERN SOUNDS IN COUNTRY MUSIC
STURGILL SIMPSON (2014)

Its title an arch nod to Ray Charles' album all those years before, Simpson's second solo release is every bit as boundary-pushing as its illustrious predecessor. With trippy opening track *Turtles All The Way Down* setting the tone, country music never sounded quite so psychedelic. Elsewhere, *The Promise*, a cover of UK band When In Rome's minor hit, is guaranteed to defrost the iciest of hearts.

Latest 2014 Loose £25



2 TRAVELLER
CHRIS STAPLETON (2015)

Kentucky-born Stapleton cut his teeth in Nashville fronting bands (The SteelDrivers) and writing hit songs for other country artists for over a decade. It wasn't until the release of his solo debut album that the bearded troubadour hit paydirt. The Dave Cobb-produced *Traveller* is a wonderfully realised, instant classic of an album and, yep, it's as smooth as Tennessee whiskey.

Latest 2015 Mercury Nashville £25

1 MIDWEST FARMER'S DAUGHTER
MARGO PRICE (2016)

Released on Jack White's Nashville-based Third Man label, Margo Price's retro country debut album established her as a powerful storytelling songwriter to be reckoned with. Standout track, the stately *Hands Of Time*, is all the more heart-wrenching when you realise the tale of personal tragedy is true. This farmer's daughter could just be the genre's next global star. ●

Latest 2016 Third Man £25

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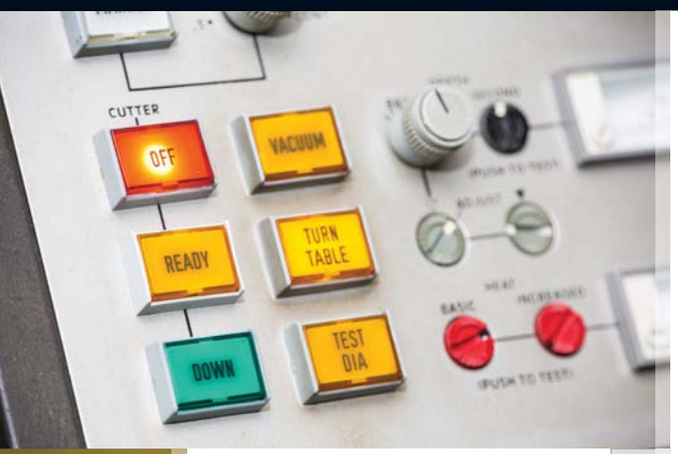
MIDAS TOUCH

Alchemy Mastering is a world-leading analogue and digital mastering facility in London that has been cutting records for nearly 20 years. **Murray Stassen** meets owners Barry Grint and Matt Colton to talk about the company's history and their mastery of mastering…



If there's a record spinning on your turntable as you read this feature, there's a fairly good chance it was cut by either Matt Colton or Barry Grint, engineers at the world-famous Alchemy Mastering. Not convinced? Check the liner notes. Or the run-off groove, which might be inscribed with Alchemy founder Grint's signature, Bazza, etched at one of the various studios he's been a resident engineer at over his 30-year career – Tape One, Porky's, Abbey Road or, of course, Alchemy.

Grint alone has worked on over 100 UK Top 10 hits and 20 UK No. 1s. His credits include records by Prince, David Bowie and The Beatles, while Colton, who has been cutting records for 20 years and was named Mastering Engineer Of The Year at the 2013 Music Producers Guild (MPG) Awards, has worked on records from the Manic Street Preachers to The Last Shadow Puppets and Brian Eno.

"I've cut between 16,000 to 17,000 records," says Colton. "I dread to think how many Barry has cut. We've been around the block a few times and we try to make things sound as good as we can."

Long Live Vinyl is in west London at Alchemy's mastering facility, hidden away on a quiet mews road, away from the busy city streets, like a calming sanctuary for serious sound. Grint founded Alchemy in 1998, with restoration and duplication specialist Phil Kinrade joining the company as a director in 2000 from Chop Em Out.

"I'd been cutting in other studios and ended up in Abbey Road," recalls Grint. "I always wanted to work in radio, got the chance and left Abbey Road. I realised that radio was even less secure than the music industry, so I got in touch with my previous business partner and said: 'Why don't we start a company?'". Having existed in "various different guises and different locations" over the last 20 years, including the top of London's Centre Point and a Fitzrovia base before that, Alchemy's most recent incarnation was born in 2012, with Colton joining the same year.

Barry Grint, mastering engineer at Alchemy

VINYL DESTINATION

Colton says that "If there was a centre for vinyl cutting in the world, it would be London". He adds that one of the things they wanted to try to do when Alchemy opened in its current home

Pictures: Alison Zak-Collins & Blake Ezra

Alchemy engineer Matt Colton

was to focus on offering the highest-quality vinyl mastering and cutting services possible, which include pure analogue vinyl mastering and half-speed vinyl mastering.

"We took this place on and slowly built the studios and equipped them," he explains. "Most releases have a digital component to them, but from the get-go, we had quite a strong vinyl base. Everything we do, we try and do to a high standard. But with vinyl, we knew that we could really push that and try and offer all the different techniques for cutting records, and also see how we could move it forwards with the application of new technology and relearning of old techniques."

"WE'VE BEEN ROUND THE BLOCK AND TRY TO MAKE THINGS SOUND AS GOOD AS WE CAN"

Colton's keen to point out that Alchemy's owners "are sound engineers by trade", regardless of the resurgence in the vinyl market in recent years. "Alchemy has been around for nearly 20 years and Barry and Phil have been engineering for longer than that," he says. "This wasn't something that was designed to capitalise on any particular boom."

Nonetheless, the current popularity of the format for both new releases and remastered reissues means that Alchemy has been perfectly positioned to ride the wave of activity in the market. And as a result, Grint and Colton are spending a lot of time at the lathe, cutting a total of around 300 sides a month on the two lathes owned by the studio. The long-term commitment to the format has seen Alchemy invest heavily year-on-year in the vinyl-cutting side of its business. The two cutting lathes it owns aren't just any old machines, but souped-up Neumann VMS-80s, which Colton describes as "the Rolls Royce" of lathes. "It's the last lathe that Neumann built and it's the most technologically advanced," says Colton. "And not to put too fine a point on it, probably 99 out of 100 times, you can do a better cut on a VMS-80 than on any other system."

The lathes require constant maintenance and, having rebuilt the power supplies and installed custom filters to correct the EQ (RIAA) curve during half-speed cutting, Alchemy also replaces capacitors in different parts of the signal chain every year. "There are capacitors around now that sound much better than the older ones did when they were first installed," says Colton. "So we can bring a slightly greater amount of ▶

Alchemy duplication and restoration specialist Phil Kinrade

audio fidelity, while still doing it the way it was intended to be done in the first place.

"A lot of the stuff we cut is from a digital source, so we've also done a lot of work on clocking, cabling and the digital-to-analogue converters as well, so that when it's being fed from a digital source, it's as high-quality as can be."

In order to cut at half speed (a process that produces a better-sounding record due to the extra time the cutting head takes to cut the groove into the lacquer), the lathes require a significant amount of modification.

"The guy who does the mods spends hours matching components, because the manufacturer tolerance isn't anywhere near good enough," says Grint. "He spends hours meticulously matching the components in order to maintain the phase coherence."

Neumann originally built the lathe with the ability to run at half speed, according to Colton and Grint, but

Masterers Of The Universe

Alchemy Mastering's Barry Grint and Matt Colton tell *Long Live Vinyl* about a few of the recent projects they've worked on that have particularly stood out…

Leftfield
Leftism (Matt Colton)
"This record came out in 1995 and was very important for me. I was 19, 20 years old when it came out and it was a golden period for dance-music albums. *Leftism* was my favourite of the lot. I worked with Leftfield a number of times since that came out, so it was really nice to be involved in this project. In terms of the mastering side of things, it was quite difficult to piece it together from different sources… There were different versions used on the vinyl, and different versions on the CD. There was a little bit of forensic work…"

Manic Street Preachers
Send Away The Tigers (Matt Colton)
"Chris Lord-Alge mixed the original to half-inch tape and we had the tapes – it just sounded spectacular. We went back to the original tapes and started from scratch. James Dean Bradfield was in, directing the session, and it was really nice to work directly with him… The album was a half-speed cut, which was nice to do because you get a little bit more bass and low-mids power when you cut at half speed. It works really nicely when you cut a big hard-rocking guitar band. The lovely low mids from the guitar really sing out."

Radiohead
OKNOTOK (Barry Grint)
"The main mastering was done by Bob Ludwig in the US and the master was sent over to me to use for cutting the vinyl… You have to make some small adjustments to accommodate vinyl as part of the sort-of-normal process of transferring to vinyl. Half speed is a little trickier than a normal cut, in so far as it's not happening in real time. So when you want to do test cuts and check that sections will transfer cleanly, it's something of a laborious process. It wasn't just lacquers; it was also acetates that we cut, as well."

Jamie Lawson
Happy Accidents (Barry Grint)
"Quite often, there will be one set of master files and they will be used for the digital version and the vinyl and everything else. With this particular project, the digital is being mastered out in the States, but I did the mastering and the cutting for the vinyl, which means that I didn't need to put in all the extra compression and limiting that you would usually do on a normal release, because I only had to worry about the vinyl. So the vinyl will have a more dynamic sound than the digital release will. I think it will sound better for it."

they say it's an old technique that fell completely out of favour – for a number of reasons. "Not least the fact that it takes so long to do," Colton explains. "But the mechanics of it were set. Essentially, what you need to do now is alter the electronics – and doing that is very complicated. The signal path going up through the amp rack is massively convoluted."

When the VMS-80 lathe was brought out by Neumann, studios were primarily cutting from reel-to-reel and the half-speed frequency correction was being done on the reel-to-reel going to the lathe, rather than in the machine itself.

"This causes no end of problems if you are actually EQing off the tape," says Grint. "In fact, you can't – so you have to make an EQ production tape, then put that on the tape machine, and then plug in the filters, so you can do it half speed. You can see why it didn't really catch on. The difference now is taking that modification of the RIAA curve and doing it within the cutting rack. That opens up the possibility of doing it from tape or from the workstation, but in a much smoother workflow."

ANALOGUE CONVERTS

In front of Colton's custom-designed workstation housing his console and outboard processors are ATC monitors, which stand either side of a modified Studer A80 tape machine with 'Decca style' ultra-low-noise replay amps. It's capable of playing both quarter-inch and half-inch tapes and allows Alchemy to offer a fully analogue cutting service, with no digital intermediary stage.

"We do a lot of pure analogue disc mastering. When we're dealing with older recordings, we encourage the client to try and see if there are analogue tapes available," says Colton. "Where we can, we will then, if it's a reissue, try and do a pure analogue disc cut. So we'll be going straight from the tape machine to the lathe. To a certain extent, we're trying to replicate the way it was done originally."

Grint recalls that Alchemy purchased its very first lathe at the time when most engineers were moving over to digital workstations, with the art of vinyl cutting under threat from the ubiquitous digitalisation of the studio environment.

"It was the beginning of anyone with a computer and a bit of cash deciding that they were a mastering engineer," remembers Grint. "But you can't just go out and buy a lathe and expect to cut, you actually have to know what you are doing." He stresses the expertise required to cut records to the level of Alchemy's output. "It kind of helps for people who don't know mastering engineers or facilities," he says. "It's a bit of a guide, in that, if you are cutting vinyl, you must know some stuff."

"YOU CAN'T GO AND BUY A LATHE AND EXPECT TO CUT, YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT YOU ARE DOING"

Barry Grint working at the Neumann VS-80 lathe

"THE NEUMANN IS BONKERS... IT'S LIKE FUTURE RETRO, APOLLO 13-LOOKING STUFF"

Colton adds that "to put this into context", after he started as a trainee in a mastering studio, it was four years before he was using the lathe on his own. "I would say it was 10 years before I knew what I was doing with the lathe," he continues. "I would say now, after 20 years, I'm starting to get the hang of it, but there's more that I don't know about the vinyl-cutting system and how it works than I do know. It's not like you can get a system and three months later, you're doing it right."

And in spite of having cut records for the better part of two decades, Colton is still in awe at the mechanics of the lathe and the process of cutting records, and understands why artists like to be present when their music is being cut to vinyl. "You don't see a lot of stuff like this," he says, pointing towards the Neumann lathe. "It's a metal-working lathe that records music. It's bonkers… it's like future retro, Apollo 13-looking stuff."

Grint says that he's been getting a considerable amount of half-speed assignments lately, such as The Rolling Stones' *Blue & Lonesome* released in December 2016, Rag'n'Bone Man's debut LP, *Human* and Declan McKenna's debut album, *What Do You Think About The Car?*. Alchemy has also become the studio of choice for the cutting of various high-profile reissues, with seasoned artists entrusting Grint and Colton with their prized records from their formative years, including the 22-year-anniversary reissue of *Leftism* by seminal electronic act Leftfield and *OKNOTOK,* Radiohead's 20-year-anniversary release of *OK Computer*.

"I think that people recognise that cutting vinyl is an artform in itself," says Grint. "There's quite a lot of [half-speed work] coming through."

FULL CIRCLE

Colton suggests that because labels are much more confident they can get a return on investing in making a good vinyl product, "they're willing to invest in good mastering and they are willing to invest in better quality pressings. In the early 2000s, major labels would do vinyl on certain things, but for most things, they wouldn't bother. Now everyone is doing it. The demise of CDs has really helped invigorate vinyl.

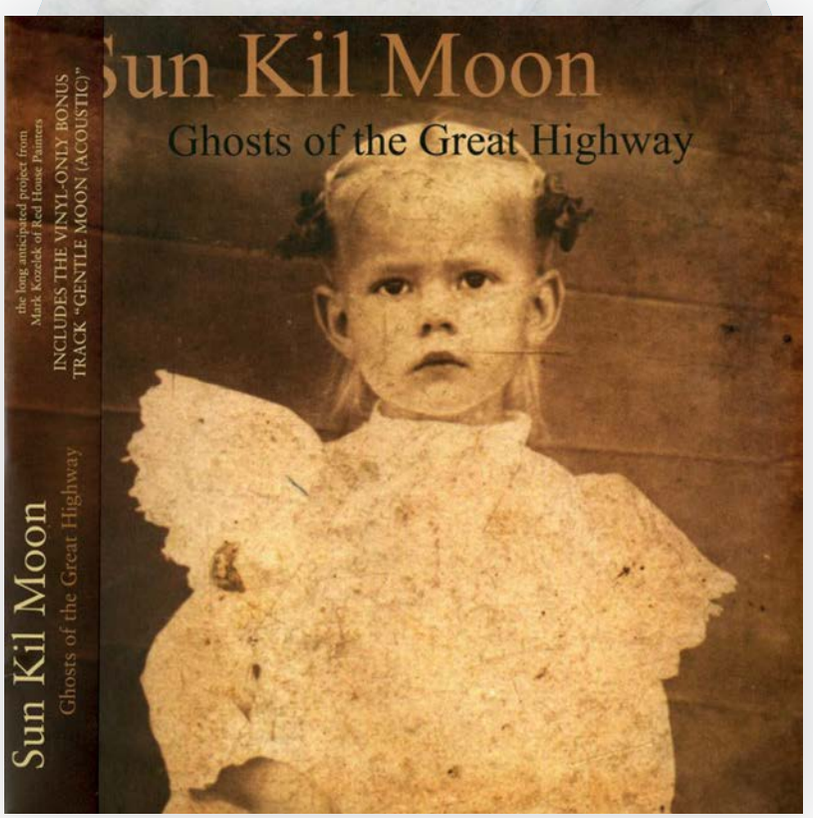
"We like to own things, we like to have collections, we like to have nice things in our lives and vinyl records really are that." Grint agrees. "Vinyl is a very tactile thing," he says, and compares the relationship between streaming and vinyl now to the relationship between vinyl and radio back in the day. "You would hear the stuff you would like on the radio and then the things you really liked, you would go out and buy on vinyl. Then you would have all of the artwork in the gatefold sleeves and all of the other stuff," he adds.

"The economics are pretty simple," adds Colton. "People are doing gatefold, full-colour sleeves, with printed inserts and printed bags – all of which feeds back into making the customer think, 'I'll go out and buy that – it's £25 for the double album, which is a reasonable amount of money, but I am getting a really nice thing, which I can keep forever and treasure'. Also, artists always want to have a physical copy of their music. All these things have helped the vinyl boom."

With our interview nearing its end, we ask Grint and Colton what their plans are for the future, having already built up such extensive portfolios both individually and as a part of Alchemy.

"We are a boutique facility and we're not looking to take over the world," concludes Colton. "We just enjoy coming to work, which is more valuable than you could possibly quantify." ●

Choice Cuts #6



SUN KIL MOON

GHOSTS OF THE GREAT HIGHWAY

PROMO ON WHITE MARBLED VINYL

This slab of essential Americana from the pen of Ohio songwriter Mark Kozelek is made all the rarer by its release on white marbled vinyl

WAX FACTS
Sun Kil Moon
Ghosts Of The Great Highway
Promo copy
Year **2003**
Format **Marbled white vinyl**
£295

Despite being known for rubbing people up the wrong way these days, Mark Kozelek is among the most intriguing songwriters of the last 20 years. From defining the 'slowcore' genre with Red House Painters, to releasing full albums of AC/DC covers in his own unique style, everything Kozelek touches turns to gold. His crowning glory, however, is with Sun Kil Moon. Essentially a solo project, Kozelek spills his guts in a brutally honest, diary-like manner, set to an elegant and sullen backdrop.

The debut Sun Kil Moon album, *Ghosts Of The Great Highway*, is a timeless piece of work, and like nearly all of the vinyl releases from Kozelek, is incredibly collectable. The standard black-vinyl pressing is hard enough to find as it is, but even more special than that is the white marbled promo release, which is limited to just 300 copies.

Housed in that iconic sleeve, it comes with an obi strip and is pressed across a double LP. It's the best way to enjoy the glorious *Carry Me Ohio*, and the brooding opus that closes the album, *Duk Koo Kim*. Something else that makes a vinyl copy of the album essential to your collection is the inclusion of an acoustic *Gentle Moon*, exclusive to the vinyl release.

Tracking down a promo copy of this record does come with a hefty price tag – it's likely to set you back well over the £300 mark – but it's worth every penny. With no sign of Kozelek repressing this, or any of Sun Kil Moon's pre-Rough Trade recordings, it will only grow in value and is an essential piece of modern Americana. ***Glen Bushell***

Classic Album

R.E.M.

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

Burnt out from touring and burdened by the pressure of following up a hit record, R.E.M. began work on their eighth studio album. 25 years on, as the band's record label prepares to unveil a Deluxe reissue of *Automatic For The People*, **Neil Crossley** assesses its challenges, its creation and its enduring legacy…

AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE
R.E.M.

MIKE MILLS
Though his main instrument in R.E.M. was the bass, Mills provided harmony vocals and keys and, along with Peter Buck, wrote many of the band's songs. Since the band split, Mills has been involved with various musical projects in the indie, classical and live arenas

PETER BUCK
'Automatic…' was originally conceived as a rock album, in marked contrast to its folkier predecessor, 'Out Of Time', and it was guitarist Peter Buck who championed this change of direction. The album took a decidedly different turn, but still features some outstanding – often quite heavy – guitar playing

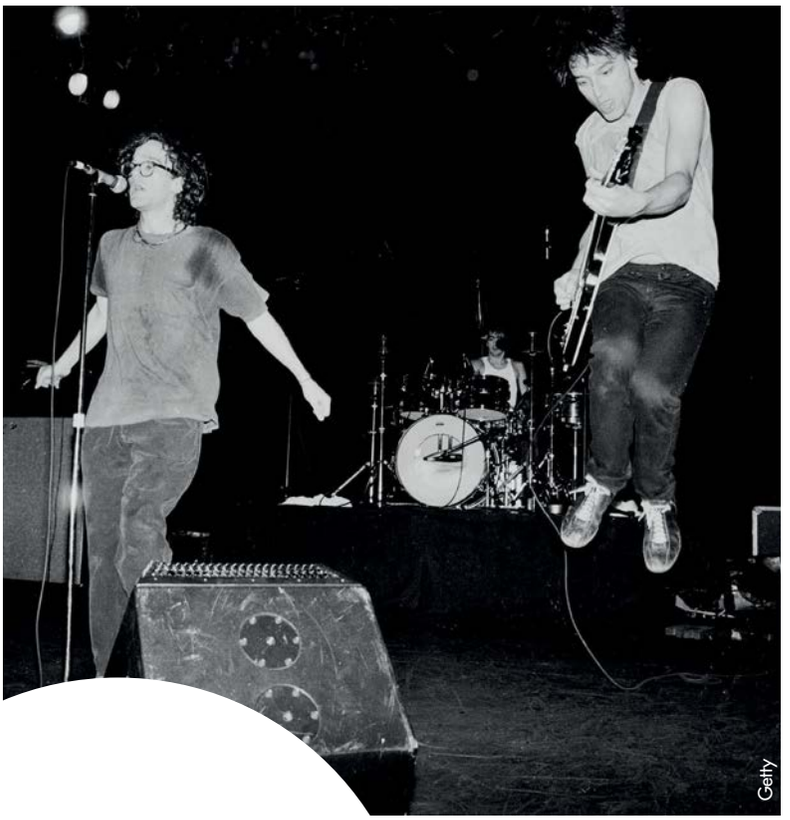
BILL BERRY
Early jam sessions for 'Automatic For The People' saw the members play without drums, and swap roles and trade instruments. Berry played bass, and also contributed the original musical sketch of the album's torchsong, 'Everybody Hurts'. Berry left the band in 1997 to become a farmer

MICHAEL STIPE
Stipe told 'Rolling Stone' that the band's rough demos were: "pretty fucking weird". He matched the musical experimentation with characteristically oblique lyrics, exploring themes of mortality, hopelessness and anger… a far cry from the "bubblegum music" of 'Shiny Happy People'

On a sweltering August day in 1992, in the genteel US city of Athens, Georgia, one of the city's most celebrated residents paid a visit to a 40-seat soul-food eatery called Weaver D's Delicious Fine Foods, in the historic downtown district, on Broad Street. The resident – 32-year-old R.E.M. vocalist Michael Stipe – was accompanied by the band's lawyer and manager, Bertis Downs, and they were on their way to speak to the restaurant's owner, Dexter Weaver.

Stipe wanted to ask Weaver for his permission to use a slogan that he had coined for his business – 'Automatic For The People' – as a title for R.E.M.'s forthcoming album. Weaver knew little about rock music. Motown was more his thing, and he was unaware quite how colossally successful the four musicians who sometimes ate in his restaurant had become. But a deal was soon struck, with Weaver receiving "a pretty good amount" for his slogan. "My life changed… it just put the biggest smile on my face," he recalled, as the deal put his business on the rock-music map and sent R.E.M.'s global fanbase beating a path to his door.

For R.E.M., the deal was equally pivotal. It marked a green-light moment for an album that many consider to be their finest work. Released in October 1992, *Automatic For The People* went on to sell in excess of 15 million copies worldwide. 25 years on, its emotive power is as enduring as the day it was released.


Getty

Nicolas Henderson

R.E.M. formed in 1980 after record store employee Peter Buck saw student Michael Stipe browsing in his store

EARLY YEARS

It had been 12 years earlier when R.E.M. formed in the Southern college town of Athens, after record-store employee and guitarist Peter Buck noticed student Michael Stipe browsing in the store. "He was a striking-looking guy," recalled Buck, "and he also bought weird records."

Buck suggested they form a band and, after recruiting Mike Mills (bass) and Bill Berry (drums), the nascent R.E.M. began writing, rehearsing and playing every gig they could get. Sound-wise, they were post-punk, lo-fi, country-tinged and minimal, but in terms of emotion and impact, they were epic. Buck's ringing, arpeggiated Rickenbacker jangle, Mills' weaving, melodic basslines and Berry's solid rhythmic urgency defined the sound. What really set R.E.M. apart, though, was Stipe's voice. Early R.E.M. lyrics were obscure and tantalisingly elusive, immersed as they were within Stipe's barely discernible syllables and phrasing, and delivered in a way that often made it seem more of an instrument than a vocal.

Their 1983 debut album *Murmur*, on the independent label I.R.S., was critically lauded and the band built up a strong cult following via US college radio. By 1987, they were selling out arenas, following their 'breakthrough' album *Document*, which yielded their biggest UK and US hit to date, *The One I Love*.

That same year, they left I.R.S. for the might of Warner Bros. Records. Their first album for the major label, *Green* (1988), saw the band touring exhaustively and experimenting with their sound. But it was the follow-up album, *Out Of Time* (1991), that catapulted them forcibly into the mainstream.

Getty

Star Sign

A greyed-out photo of a star-shaped neon motel sign, shot by Anton Corbijn, graces the front cover of *Automatic For The People* and evokes a brutalist, Soviet-style aesthetic. The cover was designed by Stipe and friend/collaborator Chris Bilheimer and its stark elements continue on the back cover, where the song titles are laid against a two-storey building. The motel is still there, at 6150 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami, but the star is not, as it was damaged in a hurricane. The motel theme is echoed elsewhere in the artwork. The interior jacket shows a two-to-three storey circular platform that was the sign for the old Bon Aire Motel on the former Motel Row on Miami Beach. The Bon Aire and other establishments in the area have mostly been demolished for new high-rise condominiums.

Previous page, top: R.E.M. at the Hollywood Palladium in June 1984, on the 'Reckoning' tour

Previous page, bottom: Dexter Weaver's soul-food restaurant, whose slogan provided the album's title

Above: The band pose early on in their career, in Park West, Chicago, 1983

The band eschewed traditional rock instrumentation for the mellower sounds of mandolin, organ and acoustic guitar. The album topped the UK and US charts and went on to sell over 18 million copies worldwide. It was a simple, lilting five-note mandolin motif from Peter Buck that introd the band's biggest ever single, *Losing My Religion*. "There have been very few life-changing events in our career, because our career has been so gradual," reflected bassist Mike Mills. "But if you want to talk life changing, *Losing My Religion* is the closest it gets."

HOW TO FOLLOW A HIT

For most artists, recording the follow-up album to such a colossal release as *Out Of Time* would be a daunting prospect. But as always, R.E.M. put aside commercial concerns and simply followed their creative instincts. In mid-January 1991, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry gathered at their West Clayton Street rehearsal room in Athens to start working on ideas. The task was eased by the band's decision, after years of exhaustive touring, to take an extended break from live work.

They wrote without drums, often swapping instruments, with Berry on bass, Mills on organ or piano and Buck on mandolin. In June 1991, they booked into John Keane's studio in Athens, to demo the songs. The plan was to create something that was far more guitar-driven, rockier and upbeat, in contrast to the lush folk-pop of *Out Of Time*. But of the 30 finished demo tracks that Buck, Mills and Berry delivered to Stipe in January 1992, only six could be considered at all upbeat. "Very mid-tempo" and "pretty fucking weird" is how Stipe described the new material to *Rolling Stone* magazine: "More acoustic, more organ based, less drums."

In February 1992, REM recorded another set of demos at Daniel Lanois' Kingsway Studio in New Orleans, set in a supposedly haunted house with no soundproofing and steeped in typical Louisiana décor, from its tiled floors to the ornate wrought-iron railings. Sessions were productive, yielding basic recordings of tracks such as *Monty Got A Raw Deal* and *Drive*. On the latter, Buck listened from the comfort of a velvet couch in the parlour as Stipe recorded

Mutual Appreciation

Among the more than 15 million copies sold of *Automatic For The People* was the one owned by Kurt Cobain. He and Michael Stipe had immense admiration for each other's work and Cobain was among the many who gravitated towards the album. Cobain spoke in interviews of wanting to emulate its haunting tones in his own music. It is alleged that *Automatic For The People* was the last album Cobain listened to before his death. Certainly, when Cobain's body was discovered, *Automatic For The People* was the album found in the tray of the nearby CD player.

his vocals from a telephone booth on the first-floor landing,

In March, they relocated to Bearsville Studios in Woodstock, New York, with co-producer Scott Litt. "Judging where Michael was going with the words, we wanted to scale it down and make it more intimate," recalled Litt. The remoteness of the studio meant limited distractions and over the next 26 days, R.E.M. laid down 18 tracks, including two songs with the working titles *Bazouki Song* and *C To D Slide*, which went on to become *Try Not To Beathe* and *Man On The Moon* respectively. Tracks from the New Orleans session continued to be developed, such as *Drive,* onto which Buck added a staggering 15 guitar overdubs.

One pivotal addition was the stirring and emotive *Everybody Hurts*, for which Stipe wrote straightforward lyrics to match the directness of the track, later making one minor but critical change to avoid any autobiographical interpretation. "There was a line that went, 'When everything is wrong, everybody hurts, even the singer of the song,'" Buck is quoted as saying, in the 2001 book …*The Complete R.E.M.*, by Rob Jovanovic and Tim Abbott. "But he (Stipe) said: 'I'm not going to sing that' and he changed it."

ON THE BEACH

After Bearsville, the band took a short break before setting off for yet another studio, Criteria Recording Studios in Miami, whose clients had included Neil Young, the Bee Gees and ABBA. "We just kind of went from studio to studio," recalled Peter Buck. "I mean, I know it sounds really rockstar-ish, but it was really entertaining to go to different

The songs

Band credits

Michael Stipe Lead vocals
Peter Buck Guitars, mandolin, bass guitar
Mike Mills Bass guitar, piano, keyboards, accordion, backing vocals
Bill Berry Drums, percussion, keyboards, bass guitar, backing vocals, melodica

Main production credits

Scott Litt and R.E.M. Production
Cliff Morrell Engineer
John Paul Jones Orchestral arrangements

Recording Studios

John Keane's Studio, Athens, GA
Kingsway Studio, New Orleans
Bearsville Studios, Woodstock, NY
Criteria Recording Studios, Miami, FL
Bosstown Recording Studios, Atlanta, GA
Bad Animals studio, Seattle, WA

1 *DRIVE*

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry
Additional musicians
John Paul Jones String arrangements
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Strings

"Hey kids, rock and roll/ Nobody tells you where to go, baby" is a standout line from the first track on the album, a haunting clarion call to a younger generation, which originated from a guitar riff Peter Buck wrote back in 1990. Buck allegedly envisaged an Appalachian feel to this song, but clearly had a rethink. Buried beneath John Paul Jones's ample string arrangements is a rousing and sardonic anthem. The title allegedly derives from Stipe and the band's support for what became the 'Motor Voter Bill', although Stipe also claimed the song was "an obvious homage to *Rock On* by David Essex". Buck added 15 electric-guitar overdubs at Bearsville Studios, in a spirit of largesse seemingly inspired by a British guitar great. "The twist there was this heavy descending guitar riff that I overdubbed six times in a row. It's a real Queen thing. I even played it with a nickel because that's what Brian May did," he said.

2 *TRY NOT TO BREATHE*

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry
Additional musicians
John Paul Jones String arrangements
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Strings

The title was inspired by a throwaway comment in the studio, while Peter Buck was laying down guitar parts at the demo stage. "I had microphones that were an inch away from my guitar," he recalled. "They said: 'You've got to be really quiet when you do this recording,' and I said: 'Well, I'll try not to breathe,' and I started playing. And Michael said: 'Oh, that's a good title'." Lyrically, the song was inspired by mortality. In interviews, Stipe described how the track was sung from the perspective of an elderly woman, lying on her death bed, looking back over her life. The fact that such a narrative is delivered against a jaunty ¾ waltz-time backing track lends it a chilling air.

3 *THE SIDEWINDER SLEEPS TONITE*

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry
Additional musicians
John Paul Jones String arrangements
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Strings

After two relatively maudlin compositions, *Sidewinder…* launches in searingly upbeat mode. Lyrically, it's obscure, but contains some memorably quirky lines, such as "This machine can only swallow money". The song is influenced by *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* by The Tokens and there are similarities. So much so, according to *Songfacts.com*, that R.E.M. paid for the rights to use it and as part of the deal, were asked to do a cover of the original *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. This version appears on the B-side of the *Sidewinder…* single, released in February, 1993.

In 2010, a survey conducted by *The Daily Telegraph* concluded that *The Sidewinder Sleeps Tonite* contains the song lyrics most frequently misheard by listeners. The survey concluded that four out of 10 listeners mistake ''Call me when you try to wake her'' for ''Calling Jamaica''.

4 *EVERYBODY HURTS*

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck and Mike Mills
Additional musicians
John Paul Jones String arrangements
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Strings

It's hard to believe that this sublimely emotive track was originally a one-minute C&W song, brought into the studio by Bill Berry. Ironically, Berry does not even appear on the final version. Few R.E.M. tracks are as lyrically and instrumentally direct as the stirring and emotive *Everybody Hurts*, written about the high prevalence of suicides among young people. "When your day is long/ And the night, the night is yours alone/ When you're sure you've had enough/ Of this life, well hang on," it begins. The track was written primarily by Bill Berry, and the band played it over and over before landing on a feel that would best suit the track.

"We went through about four different ideas and how to approach it," said Peter Buck, "and eventually came to that Stax, Otis Redding *Pain In My Heart* kind of vibe…

The songs *continued*

It took us forever to figure out the arrangement and who was going to play what, and then Bill ended up not playing on the original track. It was me and Mike and a drum machine." In 1995, The Samaritans launched a UK press ad campaign consisting solely of the lyrics to *Everybody Hurts*, in response to the high suicide rate but low crisis service take-up among young men.

5 NEW ORLEANS INSTRUMENTAL NO. 1

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry

Less of a song and more of an interlude, this track has come in for some flak across the years, with some arguing that *Automatic For The People* would be a stronger album without it. Despite such views, *New Orleans Instrumental No. 1* serves a purpose in the album's pacing, echoing the sense of loss evoked on *Everybody Hurts* and setting the listener up for the mournful tones of *Sweetness Follows*. As one observer put it, the best way to appreciate it is to make an mp3 playlist and omit this track from it. The album is a lesser work without it.

6 SWEETNESS FOLLOWS

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry
Additional musicians
Knox Chandler Cello

Deep, overdriven cello, funereal organ and spine-tingling feedback pervade this poignant portrait of loss and mourning. "Readying to bury your father and your mother/ What did you think when you lost another?" implores Stipe. While *Automatic…* is frequently perceived as R.E.M.'s 'death' album, it is, as the band have pointed out, a work that acknowledges the existence of mortality while being an affirmation of life. The distorted cello on the track was initially done at Kingsway Studio, New Orleans by Knox Chandler of The Psychedelic Furs, who also added cello to *Monty Got A Raw Deal*. A deeply affecting song, whose vulnerability and compassion struck a chord with many.

7 MONTY GOT A RAW DEAL

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry
Additional musicians
Knox Chandler Cello

Allegedly penned by Peter Buck on a bouzouki in a New Orleans hotel room, in a bid to distract himself from the over-amorous groans of the couple in the adjacent room. Like The Clash before them, the legacy of enigmatic screen legend and gay icon Montgomery Clift proved an alluring subject for R.E.M. This paean to Clift was among the tracks that expressed darker themes on the album. "Monty this seems strange to me/ The movies had that movie thing/ But nonsense has a welcome ring And heroes don't come easy," intones Stipe, later acknowledging that "Virtue isn't everything, so don't waste time". Recorded at Kingsway Studio in New Orleans, the track was known simply as 'Bouzouki Song' until Stipe added lyrics at Criteria Sound Studios in Miami. An engaging, haunting portrait despite its somewhat plodding pace.

8 IGNORELAND

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry
Additional musicians
Scott Litt Harmonica, clavinet

An overtly political song, *Ignoreland* addresses the conditions of the US during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H W Bush. Stipe's lyrics often veer towards the cryptic, but this one breaks ranks and is downright direct. "These bastards stole their power/ From the victims of the Us v Them years/ Wrecking all things virtuous and true/ The undermining social democratic downhill slide into abysmal". According to Peter Buck, Michael Stipe sang through an amp when recording his vocals. "He wanted to get that cold anger in his voice that you get with natural distortion," said Buck. "And the song is written in Neil Young's tuning. Not that he owns it. But the Es are tuned down to D, like in *Cinnamon Girl*. I admit it, he's the one I learned that tuning from."

9 STAR ME KITTEN

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry

Originally entitled *Fuck Me Kitten*, the band had a change of heart, possibly following a visit to the studio by actress Meg Ryan – who was filming *Sleepless In Seattle* at the time. According to the book *…The Complete R.E.M.* by Rob Jovanovic and Tim Abbott, the band played Ryan the track and she noted how she was never allowed to buy songs with the word 'fuck' on the sleeve when she was young. To ensure all their fans could buy the record, the band changed the title to *F*** Me Kitten* and then simply *Star Me Kitten*. Mike Mills added backing vocals based on 10CC's *I'm Not In Love*. The lyrics remained unchanged, though. "I'm your possession/ So fuck me, kitten," sang Stipe.

10 MAN ON THE MOON

Band personnel Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry

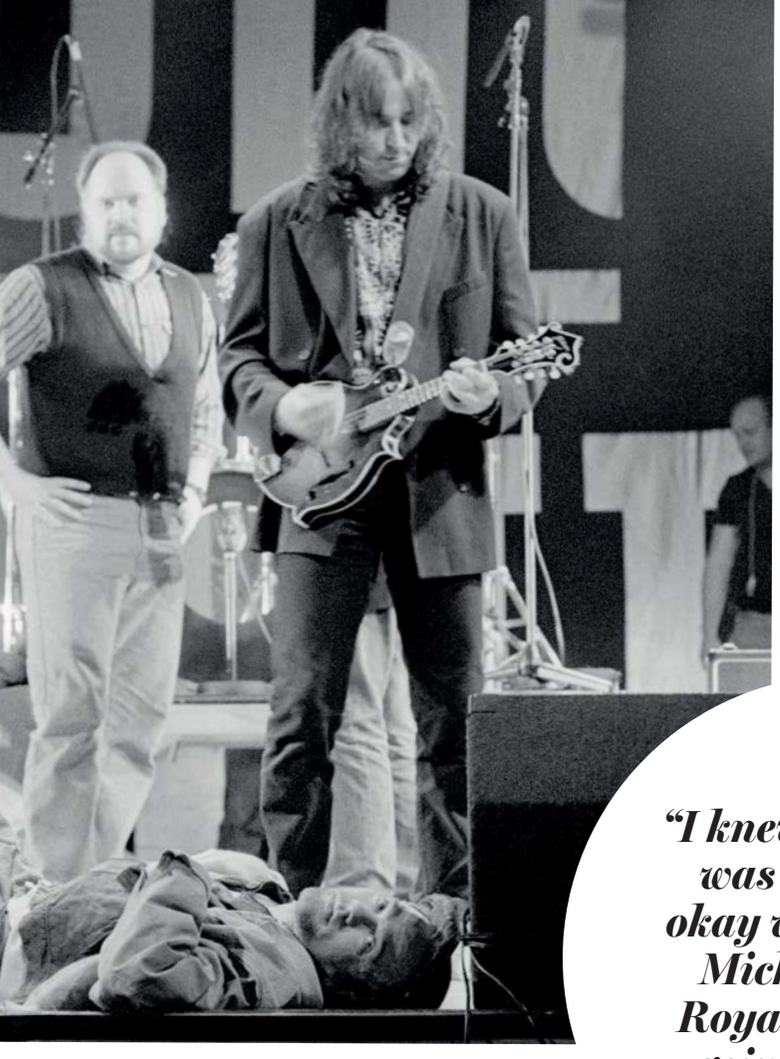
"Bill was strumming a C chord and as he leaned over to get his beer on the amp, he moved his hand, sliding the C up to the third fret," recalled Peter Buck when asked about the creation of *Man On The Moon*. "He said: 'I don't know what to do with that'. I used to finish some of Bill's things… he would come up with the riffs, but I would be the finish guy for that. We showed it to Mike

Getty

R.E.M. in the Netherlands, around the release of *Out Of Time* in 1991

Under Cover

The artwork on the inside of the album sleeve features a spread of band shots, taken on a Miami beach by revered photographer Anton Corbijn. The shots were taken during the extended break in recording at the Criteria Recording Studios in Miami, the same studio where the soundtrack to *Saturday Night Fever* was recorded. Arguably the most striking of the shots is one of Michael Stipe, up to his shoulders in the waves of the Atlantic, rear-facing baseball cap slid down the back of his head, eyes closed and with a look that falls somewhere between blissed-out reverie and blind exhaustion.



With the end of the album in sight, the band decided to use strings to augment the slow, quiet and reflective mood that was taking shape across the album. They'd dabbled with strings on *Out Of Time*, with mixed results. This time, they were taking no chances. When Scott Litt happened to meet ex-Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones, he seized on the opportunity to ask if Jones would be interested in contributing string parts. He accepted, and the band sent him four tracks. By the time his plane touched down in Atlanta in June 1992, for sessions at Bobby Brown's Bosstown studio, the former Zep bassist was armed with charts for the musicians.

Over 12 hours of sessions, spread across four days, Jones led members of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra through his arrangements. By the time they had finished, they had laid down string parts on four tracks: *Drive, Everybody Hurts, The Sidewinder Sleeps Tonite* and *Nightswimming*.

OUT INTO THE WORLD

After the Bosstown sessions, R.E.M.'s city-hopping studio odyssey had one last port of call – Bad Animals studio in Seattle, for mixing in June and July 1992. It also yielded one final creative high point. A simple chord sequence created by Bill Berry months earlier was revisited, with Stipe seizing upon the composition to create a surreal lyrical narrative.

"I knew everything was going to be okay when I heard Michael Stipe's Royal typewriter going at four in the morning"

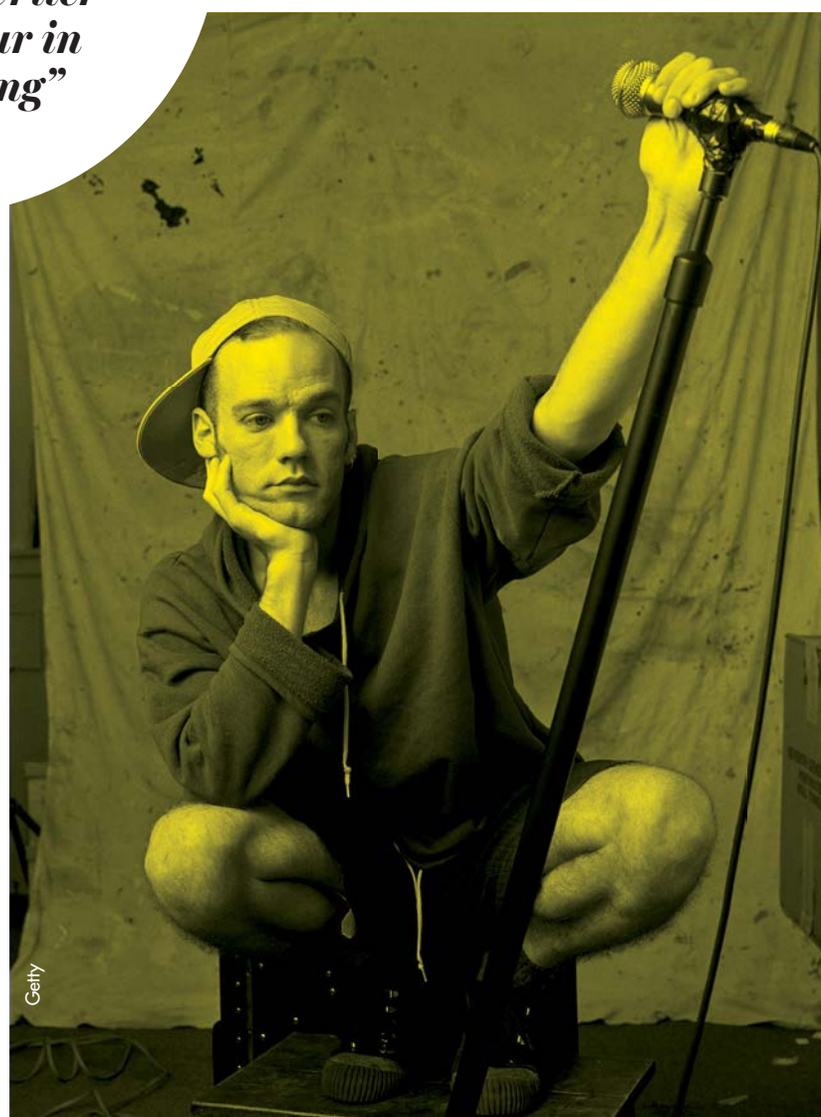
cities." It was certainly a change from the backwoods of Bearsville. Beach houses on the Atlantic Coast were rented and, one by one, Buck, Mills and Berry would add their remaining parts to the basic tracks, leaving Stipe to record his vocals. But despite the lush surroundings, there was a nagging sense of unease.

"Midway through Miami, we were kind of looking at each other wondering what the hell this record was going to sound like, or how we were going to finish it," recalled Bill Berry. "I think the turning point was not worrying about it. We took a weekend off and just said: 'To hell with it, we're going to have fun in Miami'. It was a great place, we were on the beach, and we all came back in fresh and things started clicking."

For Berry, the real turning point was when he heard the industrious clatter of an inspired Michael Stipe writing lyrics on his Royal typewriter. "I knew everything was going to be okay when I heard that Royal going at four o'clock in the morning," said Berry.

DARK THEMES

As Stipe's lyrics came to light, one fact became abundantly clear – this would be by far the darkest album of the band's career to date. Lyrically, it focused on mortality and loss, themes that, in some ways, reflected the situation the four members of R.E.M. found themselves in at the start of the 90s. "The world that we had been involved in had disappeared," Buck said, "the world of Hüsker Dü and The Replacements, all that had gone, all those bands were broken up or in the process of breaking up. We were just in a different place and that worked its way out musically."



Getty

Right: Stipe deep in thought at R.E.M.'s rehearsal studio in Atlanta

Next page: R.E.M. perform on a TV show in the Netherlands

The songs *continued*

and Michael when they came in later; definitely we had the song finished. I think Bill played bass and I played guitar; we kept going around with it. I think we might have played some mandolin on it in the rehearsal studio."

On the final day of the recording sessions, Stipe had not yet written lyrics to the song and Buck, Mills and Berry pleaded with him to try to complete the song. Listening to the track on a walk around Seattle to cure his writer's block, Stipe was inspired to write a song about the late comic Andy Kaufman. He laid down the vocal, the song was mixed that night and sent out the next day to be mastered. In many ways the archetypal R.E.M. song, while being Stipe's homage to Kaufman, it also manages to name-check both Mott The Hoople and Elvis.

11 NIGHTSWIMMING

Band personnel
Michael Stipe, Mike Mills
Additional musicians
John Paul Jones String arrangements
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Strings
Deborah Workman Oboe

The song began with a very simple piano melody by bassist Mike Mills, who apparently didn't see much value in it. Stipe, however, thought it was sublime and wrote this tender song around the structure. Stipe is accompanied only by Mills on piano, a lush string arrangement by John Paul Jones and a prominent oboe played by Deborah Workman in the latter half of the track. Mills' chord progression is strident and purposeful, avoiding any saccharine melodic indulgences. The piano that Mills played at Criteria Sound Studios in Miami was the same one Bobby Whitlock and Jim Gordon used to play the iconic ending of *Layla* by Derek And The Dominoes.

Opinions vary on the exact meaning behind the lyrics. Mike Mills has said the track is about the early 80s when the band and its circle of friends would go skinny dipping after the Athens clubs closed at night. "We'd go to parties, we'd go to the clubs… and there would be any number of these same 50 people, so it was a very tight circle of friends," he said in David Buckley's 2002 book *R.E.M. | Fiction: An Alternative Biography*.

Peter Buck holds a similar view. But Stipe has insisted that most of it is made up, albeit with some autobiographical elements. In Johnny Black's 2004 book *Reveal: The Story Of R.E.M.* Stipe said the song is about "kind of an innocence that's either kind of desperately clung onto or obviously lost".

12 FIND THE RIVER

Band personnel
Michael Stipe, Peter Buck, Mike Mills and Bill Berry

The concluding track on the album reached fruition during a break in the band's recording at Criteria Sound Studios in Miami. Stipe came up with lyrics around 3am as he and Mike Mills drove around Miami in a convertible while belting out harmonies. Renewal and the passage of time are prevailing themes here, with elemental references pervading throughout. "The ocean is the river's goal/ A need to leave the water knows/ We're closer now than light years to go."

It's one of many R.E.M. tracks that benefit enormously from the impeccable backing vocals of Mike Mills and Bill Berry. "I had the idea that Bill and I would go in and do some harmonies without listening to each other," Mills told *Melody Maker*. "It's great, because mine is this incredibly angst-ridden emotional thing, and Bill's is this really low-key sort of ambling part. They're two opposite ends of the spectrum but they're both on there, and it's a beautiful thing." A poetic, poignant and magical resolution to a sublime record.

The track was *Man On The Moon* and the band were so enthused that it was quickly completed, to ensure inclusion on the album. "It was written and recorded the day it was delivered to the record company," recalled Stipe. "Although it was a 40-hour day."

After an intense 19 months of writing, rehearsing, recording and mixing in studios across six US cities, R.E.M. had completed the 12 songs that would make up their eighth studio album. Some critics were clearly confounded by this creative left turn, the album's sombre themes and the non-appearance of a rockier, upbeat riposte to *Out Of Time*. But as the dust settled, it became clear that here was a work of real emotional depth. Beneath the themes of loss and yearning lay a sense of life-affirming hope and a shimmering, complex beauty. 25 years on, it remains their enduring masterpiece. ●

Living Legend

John Paul Jones's string parts brought a majesty and fullness to *Automatic For The People*. His presence at Bobby Brown's Bosstown Recording Studios in Atlanta also prompted much interest and excitement.

"It's funny, 'cause we were working at Bosstown studio, which is Bobby Brown's studio, so all the kids who work there are younger, kind of hip-hop-oriented kids," recalled Peter Buck. "R.E.M. doesn't mean anything at all. That's cool. But they all had their Led Zeppelin CDs down the day they knew John Paul Jones was there and they're all kind of waiting in line with their hands shaking. Led Zeppelin is so universal – it's like all these kids, it's not their world at all and they knew who it was. I was really impressed. They probably sampled his stuff!"

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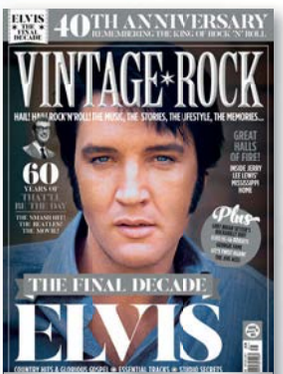

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A FEAST OF FRIENDS

BANQUET RECORDS, KINGSTON UPON THAMES

Driven by a desire to create a musical community, Banquet Records in Kingston upon Thames have been celebrating their love of vinyl for over a decade now. Everyone is welcome to the party, **Wesley Doyle** discovers… even Peter Andre

"We don't have a mission statement or anything, but I guess it's a punk DIY mentality as a lifestyle choice, rather than a musical one." Banquet Records' Jon Tolley is trying to sum up the ethos of the record shop he's run since 2006. "It's about living your own way, creating and innovating, but at the same time profit isn't a dirty word."

The 40-year-old, along with Mike Smith and Jane Unwin, has steered the business from the brink of ruin to being one of the most well-respected and successful independent record shops in the country. "When we started, it was like a punk-rock DIY collective," he says. "It's gone from the dead-end work you do until you get a real job into being that real job. But it definitely wasn't that at the beginning."

Banquet isn't situated in the most salubrious part of Kingston upon Thames' shopping district, wedged as it is between a greasy-spoon café and a kebab shop, but Tolley, Kingston born and bred, used to go to the "dark and scary" shop back when it was part of the Beggars Banquet group.

"After I came back from University, I started working there part-time while thinking about what to do with my life," he says. "I didn't really know [Beggars Banquet founder] Martin Mills then – I know him more now – but then, he was the boss of a big multi-million-pound entity. When they got rid of their retail arm, he sold the shop to my old boss."

Under the new owner, the shop struggled and eventually, things got so bad they couldn't afford to buy stock – or pay the staff's wages. "I'd not been paid for nine months, but at that time, I'd rather the shop had stock and customers than I have money," he says. "I was being paid to DJ locally from my association with the Banquet, which was how I justified not getting paid to actually work there. During that time, Mike and I learnt how to run the business and saw how we could change things and make things better. After a couple of years, the shop went into the ground and that's when we got it.'

Smith, who was originally brought in to oversee the dance side of the business, remembers it being a struggle. "The first two years were tough going," he says, "but it was always with something in sight and doing everything for the greater good. At the time, we had no responsibilities, just a passion for music and youthful naivety."

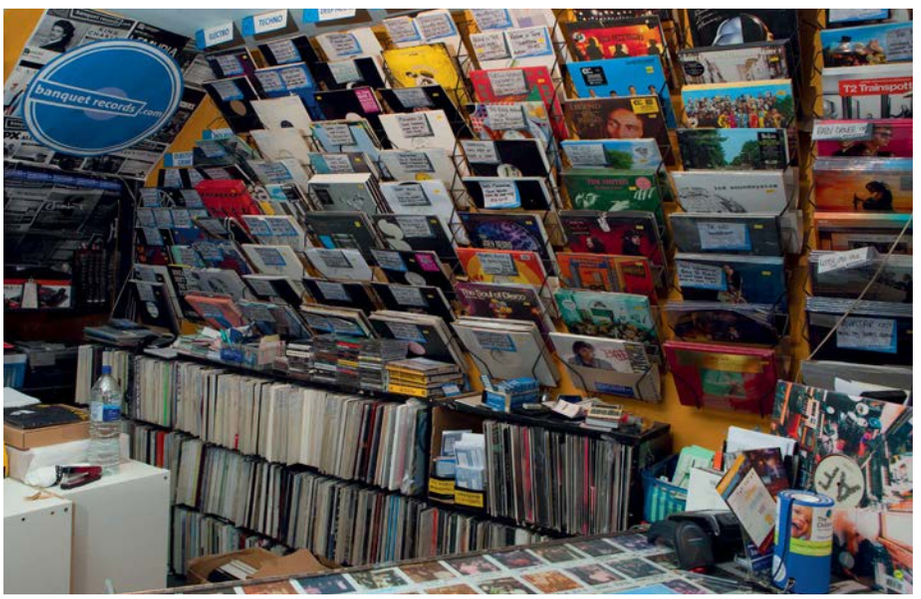
SHOWS AND SIGNINGS

That optimistic outlook included starting their own record label (Banquet Gravity DIP) and continuing the shop's tradition for organising events. "The guy who used to run that side of things quit," says Tolley. "And as those gigs and nights were basically my social life, I didn't want to see them die out, so I took over."

Being a university town means there has always been an audience in Kingston to support Banquet's mixture of club nights and gigs, but Tolley has seen the demographic change. "Banquet have never organised student-specific nights, just nights people of a student age would want to go to," he says. "But increasingly, the bands that we put on – The Charlatans, Ride, Public Service Broadcasting – have seen the average age go up to around 40 and that's really cool."

Recent events have included gigs by Sleaford Mods, Dizzee Rascal, Grizzly Bear and alt-J, with even bigger acts being turned down due to suitable venues not being available. This may become a regular problem, should the planned closure of Kingston's Hippodrome, where Banquet hold most of their gigs, go ahead.

Tolley remains relatively upbeat, though. "We've always been the driving force for turning local venues into places to watch live music and we'll keep doing



BANQUET RECORDS

that. Explaining to the council why a gig venue brings money into the community is hard, but if we can show them how important they are, then maybe they'll help us." And Tolley is well placed to engage with the council: since 2015, he's been a Lib Dem councillor. "I took the job on the council for the same reasons I took the job in the shop," he says. "It's the idea things won't happen unless someone makes them. I wanted to be someone on the inside who knows about the positives of the night-time economy as well as the negatives."

THE BLACK STUFF

Despite having a packed calendar of forthcoming events, Banquet is, at its heart, a record shop with the emphasis on 'record'. "We never, ever stopped selling vinyl," he says. "When we started, a few UK bands would put out records – but not the number of indie exclusives you get now. For some American punk bands, though, we might be the only place in the UK where you could get certain records – stuff like Panic At The Disco, Taking Back Sunday and Fall Out Boy, those kinds of bands. We ended up carving a niche and eventually, it's what we became known for. To this day, we are still the shop

THE BIG THREE

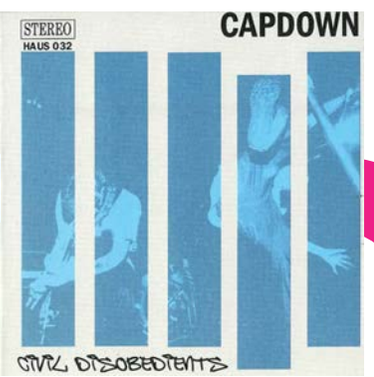
Jon Tolley – The Three Albums That Changed My Life

DON'T TURN AWAY
FACE TO FACE
1992

"This was when I discovered there was a form of music away from what you hear on the radio, something pre-internet you had to find out about from fanzines, or people with cool T-shirts. The music – fast Southern Californian punk rock – was brilliant and spoke to me about changing the world for the better."

PARKLIFE
BLUR
1994

"I was aware of *Modern Life Is Rubbish*, but *Parklife* was the one where I knew every single word and looked at the cover all the time. When Britpop exploded, it was really exciting and it's what got me going to gigs and indie clubs."



CAPDOWN
CIVIL DISOBEDIENTS
2000

"I always thought punk rock was an American thing: this was when I realised something similar was happening in the UK. It was a scene, where shows sold out by word of mouth… Capdown eventually ended up on our record label, which was quite a big thing for me at the time."

groups such as Blink-182, Biffy Clyro or All Time Low will try and involve in their album cycles. As a percentage of the business, record sales have grown recently – probably about 80% – but we never said goodbye to them. I think Record Store Day tries to take all the credit for the resurgence of vinyl and they've definitely helped, but I don't think they're the only reason."

Smith thinks the decline in paying to own digital music is another factor. "There's definitely been download fatigue," he says. "You may have a great collection of music, but essentially, it's just a laptop on a table. Flicking through records and looking at the full-size artwork has a tangibility that digital doesn't. And as soon as labels started putting download codes in with the vinyl, customers could have the best of both worlds and a lot of people made the switch back."

RSD is still a big deal at Banquet and their queue is legendary in Kingston, with some keen customers sitting in their camping chairs and sleeping bags for over 24 hours. "They meet up every year and they're all mates now," says Tolley. "It's nice to see."

Despite initial reservations, Banquet were on board with RSD from the start and, as the event has grown, so has their involvement, with Tolley even appearing on Jonathan Ross's Radio 2 show to talk through last year's releases.

"At the beginning, we were quite dismissive of it," says Tolley. "We thought it was almost patronising – we have record store day every day of the year! We also thought it was just about old bands reissuing old music, whereas we're about promoting new bands and new music. I found it quite annoying that we were supposed to get excited about a Stooges re-release or something, but after a couple of years, bands we really love – and more importantly, our customers really love – started getting involved. When Bloc Party and Slow Club both did something we thought, 'Right, this is getting exciting'.

"Now our whole business year runs around RSD and we're way busier in April than we are in December. RSD is our busiest day of the year, hands down; our second busiest is the Sunday, and our third, the Monday and so it goes until the Friday. Then online sales start, where you get a month's orders in a day.

"If there is a backlash, it's only because we've already heard the positive story – how many times can you say: 'It's a really great celebration of vinyl and shops sell loads of records?'. It's much more interesting to talk about how terrible the eBay flipping is. But it really is such a small percentage of what happens and it's kind of a necessary evil, in a way, because if the records weren't good enough to put on eBay, then people wouldn't queue up for them in the first place. Also, some shops seem to be frustrated that there are too many releases: my advice is, don't order them all. Turnover is vanity, profit is sanity. The point of RSD is to celebrate your record shop and how it does stuff. And if your record shop decides to only sell 10 things, then that's your RSD. It's down to each shop to do their own thing."

> "THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A GUILTY PLEASURE; IF YOU LIKE IT, LIKE IT. THERE'S NO PLACE FOR SNOBBISHNESS. IT ALSO MAKES SENSE, BUSINESS-WISE"
>
> **JON TOLLEY**

AND VINYL FOR ALL

Another criticism of RSD is the increasing number of releases from more mainstream 'pop' acts, something Banquet have no problem with.

"We did have people say: 'Why are you stocking Little Mix and One Direction?'" says Smith. "But we've never been dismissive about people's music taste. We had a group of 10-year-old girls queue for the One Direction single and it was the first time they'd been to a record shop and the first time they'd bought a record. We'd only have to refuse those releases and you have a whole audience who think you don't have anything to offer them."

For Banquet at least, patronising *High Fidelity*-style aloofness doesn't belong in a 21st-century record shop. "All music is music," says Tolley. "And myself and Mike particularly have always been open to the idea that there's no such thing as a guilty pleasure; if you like it, like it. Ethically, there's no place for snobbishness, but it also makes sense business-wise.

"It's the same with the signings," says Smith. "A lot of customers are surprised that we have Busted or Peter Andre or Rick Astley in to do signings, but it gets people into the habit of buying physical music. Peter Andre was great fun and it was a good thing to shout about locally, but it wasn't his music we were promoting, it was starting a conversation with potential new customers."

Tolley also acknowledges that in this internet age, there's a good chance some customers will know more about releases than he will. "15 years ago, it was more like, 'Hey, have you heard The Beta Band?', but now a kid will come in and ask for something we haven't heard of and they've got all the information in front of them. Which means we're learning, too." ●

The Trip

EAST LONDON

Mark Elliott heads over to East London to uncover buried vinyl treasure in the stores of Shoreditch and Hoxton

Okay, so I've sported a beard for the past couple of years, but no one is going to ever call me any sort of hipster. I once (rather grumpily, mind you), described Shoreditch and its neighbour Hoxton as a "state of mind" rather than a real place of any significance, but I think that childish position has been pretty much dismissed (quite rightly) with the east of the city now routinely lauded as its cultural and creative heart.

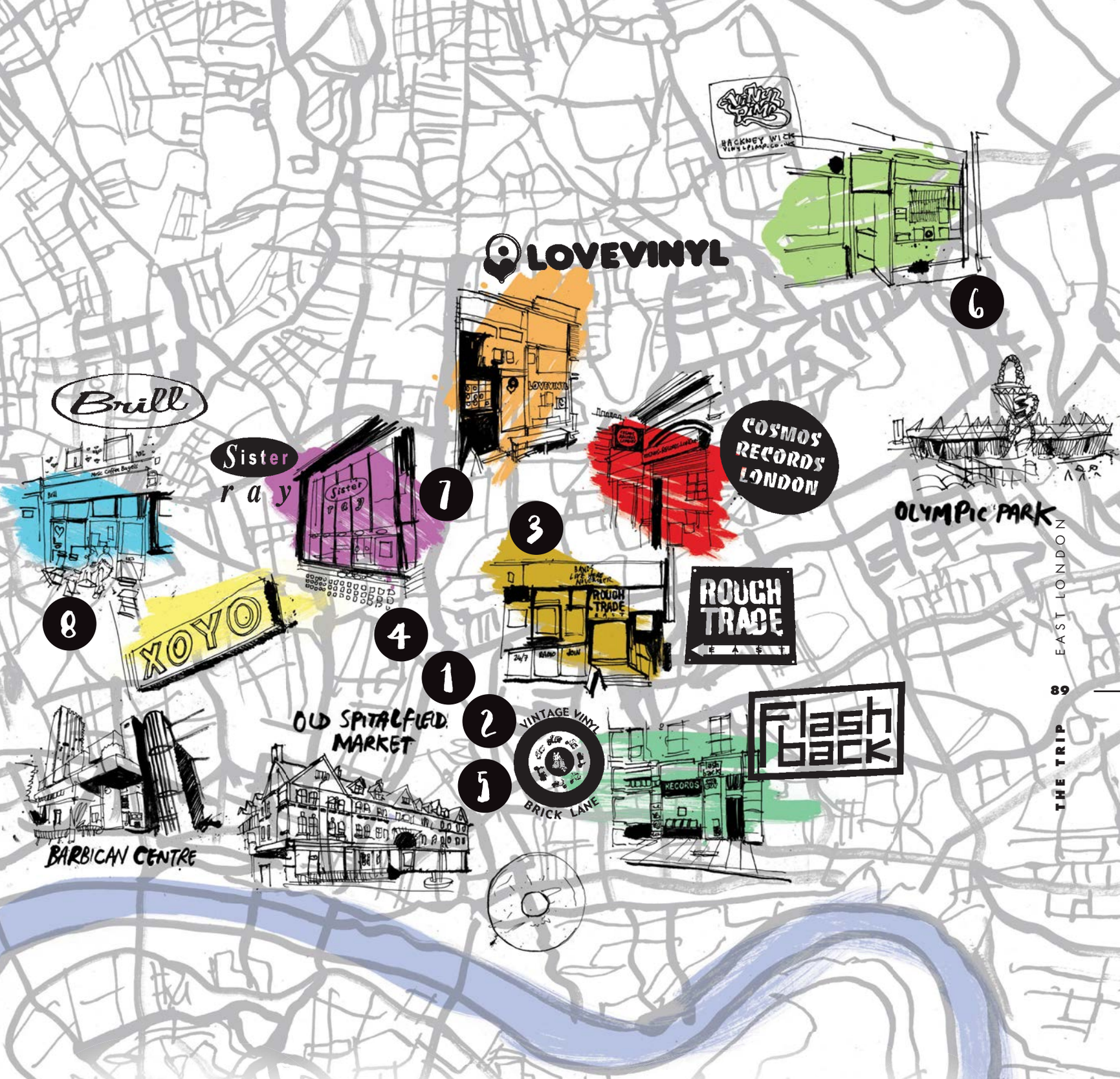
The West End might draw the tourists and the even bigger spenders, but the East is where things get interesting.

This is actually true of crate digging, too, with the former bastion of Soho largely neutered by gentrification and a corresponding raise in rents driving out all but the most resilient of record retailers. It's a shame, but the scene has certainly moved east. As always in London, it can be hard to define a strict geography on which to focus in a day's worth of shopping, but the two miles around Shoreditch High Street and the buzz of Brick Lane and Spitalfields offer exciting pickings – and can just about be covered in the allotted time, provided you're disciplined.

Offering an early stakeholding in the arts, some of Shakespeare's plays were performed in Shoreditch during the Elizabethan era and it was to rival the West End in Victorian times with its plethora of music halls and entertainment venues, before the Luftwaffe did its best to flatten the district in World War II. The late 1990s saw the creatives flood back in, lured by the decent square footage available then, and more recent years have seen the tech industries also take hold. Predictably, then, you're never far from a Flat White (or any manner of overpriced street food), but don't let my cynicism put you off. At weekends in particular, this area really buzzes and, with some of the stores skewing their opening hours to that end of the week, it's certainly the best time to go. Dance collectors will love a handful of the specialists, but there's actually a lot here for all tastes. Yes, even mine…

The east of the city is now routinely lauded as its cultural and creative heart – it's where things get interesting for crate diggers

Illustration Ben Talon



1 ROUGH TRADE EAST

Old Truman Brewery, 91 Brick Lane, E1 6QL
roughtrade.com
Opening hours
9am to 9pm Monday to Thursday, 9am to 8pm Friday, 10am to 8pm Saturday, 11am to 7pm Sunday

2 VINTAGE VINYL

Vintage Market, 85 Brick Lane, E1 6QL
trumanbrewery.com
Opening hours
11am to 6pm Thursday to Sunday

3 COSMOS RECORDS LONDON

324d Hackney Road, E2 7AX
@cosmosrecordslondon.co.uk
Opening hours
Noon to 7pm Monday to Friday, noon to 6pm Saturday, 11am to 5pm Sunday

4 SISTER RAY ACE

100 Shoreditch High Street, E1 6JQ
sisterray.co.uk
Opening hours
10.30am to 7.30pm Monday to Saturday, noon to 6pm Sunday

5 FLASHBACK

131 Bethnal Green Road, E2 7DG
flashback.co.uk
Opening hours
10am to 7pm Monday to Saturday, 11am to 6pm Sunday

6 VINYL PIMP

14 Felstead Street, E9 5LT
vinylpimp.co.uk
Opening hours
Noon to 7.30pm Monday, Wednesday to Saturday; noon to 6pm Tuesday and Sunday

7 LOVE VINYL

5 Pearson Street, E2 8JD
lovevinyl.london
Opening hours
11.30am to 7pm Tuesday to Saturday, noon to 6pm Sunday

8 BRILL

27 Exmouth Market, EC1R 4QL
exmouth.london/brill
Opening hours
7.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm Saturday, 10.30am to 4.30pm Sunday

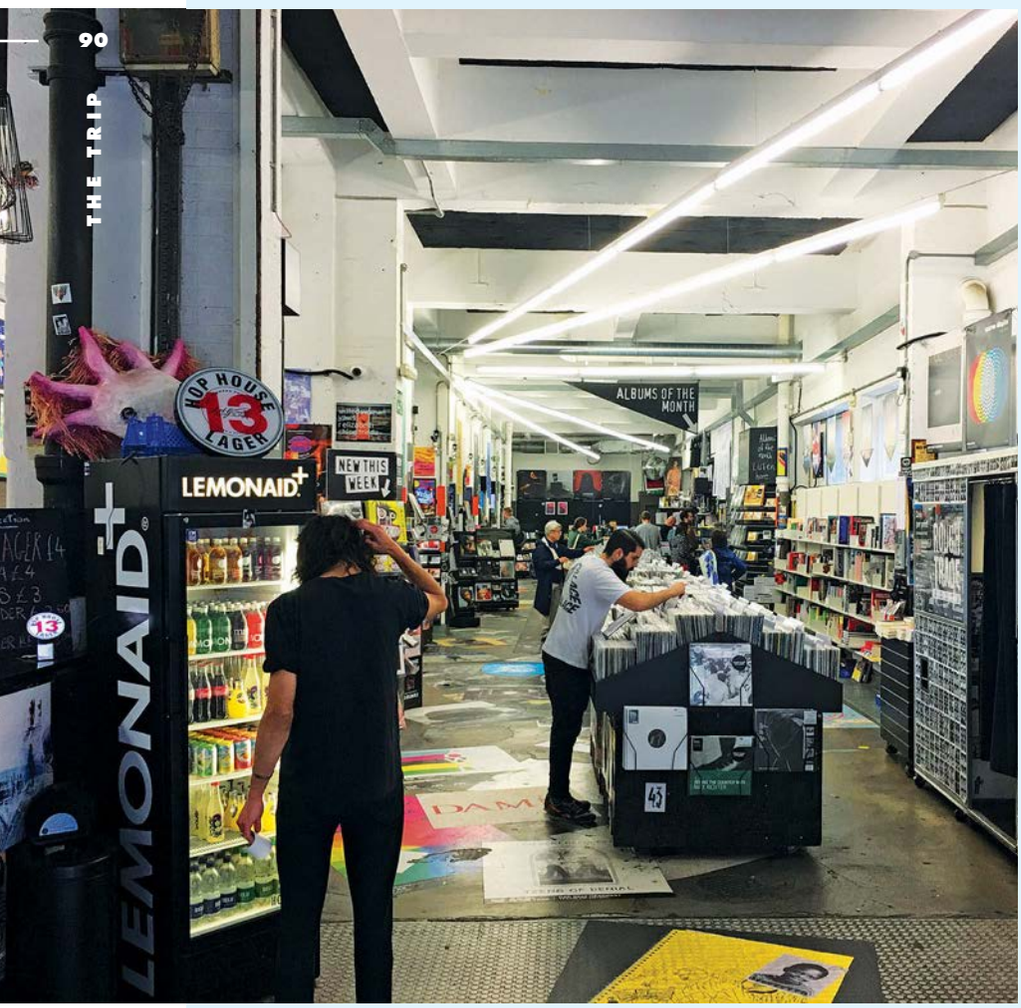
1 ROUGH TRADE EAST

Rough Trade has sold records since 1976 and, in those 41 years, has built an international reputation. Its first base was out west, in Ladbroke Grove, and following a split from its famous sister label in 1982, the stores multiplied, with branches springing up across the world. Following the fortunes of the record industry it supported, most of those folded in time, but this 5,000-square-foot Goliath was launched in 2007, shortly after a smaller branch of Rough Trade in London's Covent Garden shut up shop just shy of its 20th birthday.

This institution is far less a simple record shop and more of a lifestyle statement, with books, a stage area for live acts and, yes, Flat Whites fighting for your attention. But there's plenty of space to go around and the vinyl racks are impressive, with pretty much everything new you'd expect. It's nicely curated, with those nifty little descriptions posted on each poly-wrapped sleeve to tempt the browser. That inevitably worked its charm on me and I snapped up the green-vinyl reissue of The Time's second LP, *What Time Is It?*, convinced by Rough Trade's assurance that this Prince-produced second effort is better than The Time's first. I'm a sucker for a limited edition and the fact this Record Store Day (RSD) run is capped at 5,500 seals the deal. A remainders box suggests that there were rather too many Elvis RSD compilations for east London this year, though, and I pass on them, too.

Rough Trade does a nice line of exclusives (check out the white-vinyl edition of Girl Ray's *Earl Grey* with its bonus 7") and the venue, situated in the Old Truman Brewery, gets some great names performing here. I even find myself ordering a Flat White before I leave, so something must be working…

It's nicely curated, with those nifty little descriptions posted on each poly-wrapped sleeve to tempt the browser



3 COSMOS RECORDS LONDON

With a sister store in Toronto, Canada, this two-year-old charmer has broadened significantly from its rare groove and jazz roots. A short bus ride from Brick Lane and Spitalfields, this shop is a magnet for producers who populate the scores of small studios in the area who are searching out a fresh sample. Derek and Lizzie, who run the store, love the eclectic range that's developed over the past 24 months and explain that it's the regular shipments from across the Atlantic that keep things particularly interesting.

"We do buy stuff locally, but the batches we get every six weeks or so from our scouts over there always throw up some interesting stuff," says Derek. "We can see people picking up all sorts of genres and that's in part why we broadened the type of records we

2 VINTAGE VINYL

Billed as the East End's best-kept secret, the basement of Brick Lane's Vintage Market certainly hosts an impressive stall that's rammed with a steady stream of ever-changing stock. The claim is that there are 600 new records put out here each week and, while much of the market is full of the clothes you'll get laughed at for wearing in most British high streets, the vinyl won't embarrass anyone (despite the Amazulu picture disc that decorates the stand) and a handful of boxes of 12"s that will find it hard to even get arrested, despite today's vinyl boom. Inevitably, I like those boxes of 12"s best and the Slow Train Home Mix of Hue & Cry's 1989 hit *Looking For Linda* is soon fighting for bag space with an Amii Stewart Megamix.

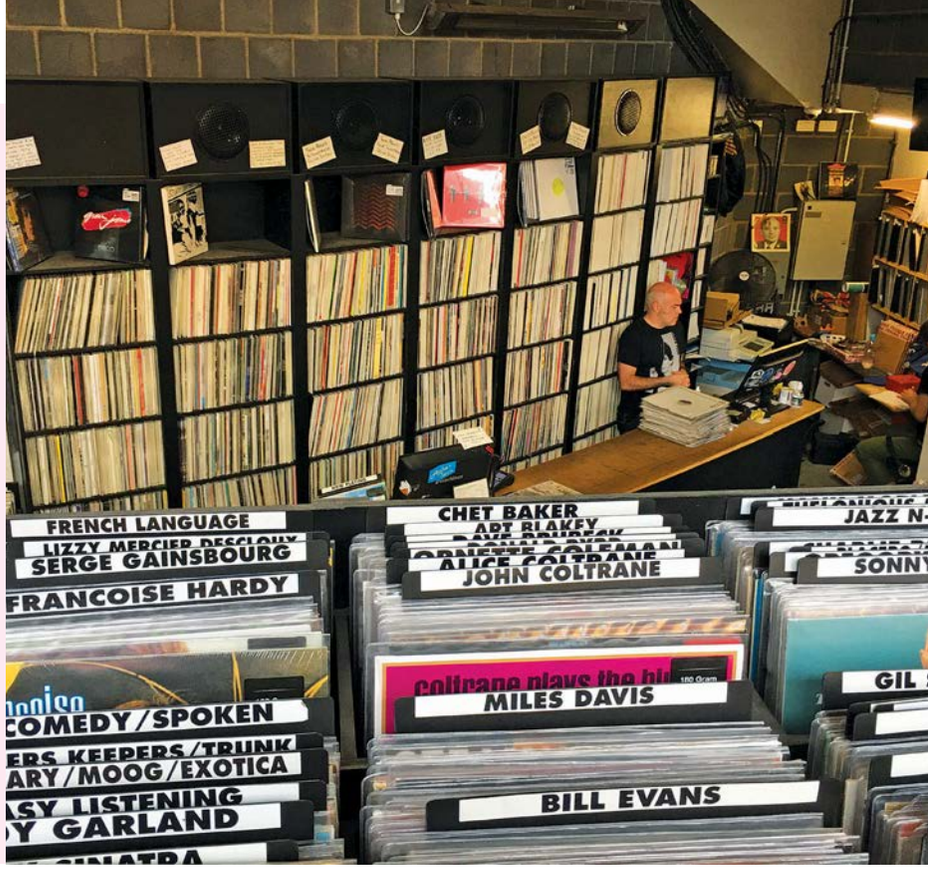
A rarely seen Funhouse Mix of the Madonna-penned *Sidewalk Talk* also catches my eye. A new mix it may be, but it's also about the fifth copy of this I now own, which must be a record (even for me). A Music For Pleasure compilation billed *Oh! What A Carry On!* boats a fabulous period sleeve and less-than-noteworthy recordings by Dora Bryan, Kenneth Williams and Joan Sims. But it's a decent price and so I also pick up a mint Suzi Quatro RAK compilation, brought out at the end of her run with the legendary pop label in 1980.

carry." There's a predominance of Latin, soul and disco, but it's true: the range is wider than you'd think. With heavy-metal specialist Crypt Of The Wizard now trading next door, Derek hopes the area will continue to attract new customers. "We had one chap here from Sweden," recalls Lizzie. "He was here, trying stuff on the decks and going through everything from noon until 7pm for three days. He was clearly working to a fixed budget and was determined to make every penny count!"

Three days might be pushing it, but you could spend a lot of time here and the atmosphere's really friendly. I decide not to insist they play my Jermaine Stewart purchase (his 1984 debut) and my slightly more credible Sheila & B Devotion disco LP is also spirited away without an airing. Somehow, though, I sense Derek and Lizzie would have gladly put up with it…

4 SISTER RAY ACE

Opened in 2014, this smaller branch of the Soho institution is built into the Ace Hotel and, despite its size, stocks a good quantity of stuff, following the store format you'll likely be familiar with. The 'jukebox classics' – a rack of lightly priced 7"s – usually hold something for me, but not this time (perhaps I'm truly coming to the end of my wants lists of Katrina And The Waves et al). Luckily, there's a good range of dance and soul 12"s that ensure my shopping reputation remains intact. Prices are fine and the second-hand here balances almost exactly the amount of new vinyl on the racks. From the latter, I source a reissue of the 1984 Italo-disco smash *Dancing Therapy* from IMS (International Music System), which reminds me of some fabulous holidays on the continent back in my favourite decade. Another 1980s relic, the reissue of the *Labyrinth* soundtrack, fills a gap in my now-improving Bowie collection. Perhaps I wasn't the only one who preferred *Underground* to some of his more celebrated work…



5 FLASHBACK

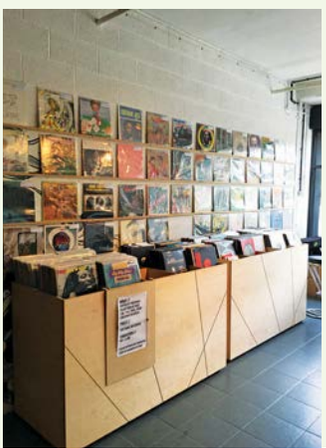
One of three branches in north and east London, what I love about Flashback is its prices (always very keen) and the range. The business tends to carry a bit of everything and, although the Essex Road store was its first (opening in 1997), I actually make a visit out here to this Shoreditch branch more often, as I personally find the stock seems to be the freshest of the three. The friendly, no-rip-off ethos that characterises the general approach is put to the test when I spy an *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* soundtrack behind the counter, minus any sort of opening price. Now, given that I was interested in it enough to ask to take a look, even I was surprised when I was told it would cost me just £1.99. I'd have paid three times as much (although I can see that the pricing on Discogs marks me the fool in that regard), but I think that's a good sign. The bargain bins are packed with discounted stock that hadn't shifted before (always a signal that turnover of stock is a high priority). Good copies of albums by disco legend Amanda Lear and a very nice pressing of *The Legend Of…* Dave Dee, Dozy, Beaky, Mick & Tich cost a few quid each, alongside even cheaper 12"s including Brian May + Friends' *Star Fleet* from 1983 and Echo & The Bunnymen's *Silver*, which had been on my wants list. The final curiosities worth sharing are a 1984 Polygram promotional disc targeting food manufacturers with a range of tracks that might help them shift more stock. KP Nuts and Dunhill Cigarettes had made a success of it, the promotional blurb proclaims, so surely the same would work for your company… With corkers like David Essex's *Tahiti* and Shakatak's *Out Of This World* on offer, the mind boggles! And then Clout, who had a mega-hit with the perky *Substitute* in 1977; by 1981, things had clearly taken a sinister turn with their *A Threat And A Promise* album sleeved in an image that wouldn't look out of place on one of those films your mother warned you about. The music was as saccharine as ever, however… those marketing bods really did have some funny ideas back then.

6 VINYL PIMP

While this is more of an online business, a short bus ride and a rather unpromising street reveals an interesting shop, particularly if dance is your thing. For five years, Vinyl Pimp has been running its warehouse from this base, where there's room to browse what's coming in and look at some key items. This year's Record Store Day was a mixed blessing for Hon, who runs the store, with his feedback being that it proved hard to source the choice material. The jury is out on whether to repeat the experiment, but the event did attract a good number of new buyers on top of the regulars. Vinyl Pimp sells records for 150 customers, too, so there's a steady – and interesting – selection of new material coming through the door. With almost 30,000 items currently for sale on Discogs, the huge wall of vinyl at the back of the store keeps the adrenaline pumping and this business gets a lot of its discs from the city's DJs. I find a very nice 7" of the Italian dance hit *Just Wanna Touch Me* from Fidelfatti With

Vinyl Pimp sells records for 150 customers, too, so there's a steady selection of new material

Ronnette; the UK 12" of Donna Summer's *On The Radio* and slightly more contemporary fare such as Aretha Franklin's *A Deeper Love* and Sophie Ellis Bextor's party anthem *Murder On The Dancefloor* on a mint 12". So not the place for a Led Zeppelin rarity then, but that suits me just fine.



Top five

1 READY FOR THE WEEKEND
The markets in East London explode into life at the weekend. Brick Lane is a day trip in itself and there are plenty of pop-ups that sell records. Pet Shop Boys, for example, ran a Shoreditch pop-up shop to launch their album *Super* in 2016.

2 DO YOU WANNA DANCE?
The east of the city is the centre of the capital's dynamic club and cabaret scene, if dance or club music is your thing. You'll need to do your research, but there are some fantastic one-nighters to satisfy everyone's taste. I still haven't forgotten Bucks Fizz In Beards…

3 THE MARKET SONG
Old Spitalfields Market holds record fairs the first and third Friday of every month, as well as on the second Saturday. It's not London's biggest, but there's a good range of genres at decent prices. I've picked up some great stuff here over the years.

4 BORDERLINE
London's a hard place to segment neatly. Other great stores just outside this Trip's boundaries include Casbah Records in Greenwich (just over the water) or punk-and-hardcore specialist All Ages Records in Camden (either could easily be added to this circuit).

5 (NOT SO) MANIC MONDAY
It's probably the day to avoid – Crypt Of The Wizard takes this day off, but has a fantastic reputation for metal records. Check out www.cryptofthewizard.com for more details. Love Vinyl is shut, too – they know how to party in this part of town, so Monday is probably recovery day!

7 LOVE VINYL

Hoxton is the epicentre of Cool London and it's inevitable that one of the capital's slickest record shops is to be found there. Dance and soul specialist Love Vinyl opened in 2014 and splits the business evenly between a full spectrum of new dance and reggae and good racks of second-hand soul, funk and disco, with some rock and pop jostling for attention, too. The new stuff draws a huge range of DJs and collectors from across the city and the Buddah reissue of Gladys Knight's *Love Is Always On Your Mind* is a super soul/disco jam that I'd had my eye on for a while. The Horse Meat Disco and Roy Inc collaboration *Waiting For You To Call* from last year also finally made its way into my shopping bag. Love Vinyl now runs a respected label and the *Modaji Headwork* EP is a slice of credible house that's typical of the decent tracks they put out. The second-hand racks fill in a Fleetwood Mac gap for me with the credible Arthur Baker remix of *Family Man* finally secured for under a fiver. The basement yields more random 1990s 12" delights such as a remix of Propaganda's *p:Machinery* from 1995 on ZTT for £1 and a double-vinyl set of remixes of Tina Arena's *Chains*, with mixes dubbed 'Dominatrix' and 'S&M'. No doubt those marketing men were having some fun there again.

Hoxton dance and soul specialist Love Vinyl is one of the capital's slickest record shops

8 BRILL

I did warn you it was all about the Flat White – and here's the best local example: a record shop that's reinvented itself as a place for the caffeine fixated, and is the perfect pitstop before you battle the commuters to get back home. Exmouth Market is full of trendy shops and places to eat and on the western edges of east London as you head back into town. Back in 1999, Brill started life as Clerkenwell Music, selling records and CDs, before adding coffee and bagels and getting a full reinvention in 2011.

There are mainly new records for sale, although a perky box of second-hand stuff was out when I popped by. In truth, my budget was exhausted, so nothing new joined the haul here. But I did buy a very nice Flat White. As my second of the day, I'd say bets are off that the beard may get more elaborate from this point on. I'll keep you posted! ●

Brill is a record shop that's reinvented itself as a place for the caffeine fixated – the perfect pitstop before you battle the commuters to get back home

The Trip

Getting there

Forget your car – the traffic isn't great and there is nowhere to park this central that won't cost you an arm and a leg. You can have a Visitor Oyster Card online sent out to your home before you arrive (if you're not a Londoner and you order online). Otherwise, UK debit cards work contactlessly on the transport network, or you can buy a Travelcard on the day. Many of these stores are within walking distance, although you'll need the Overground from Shoreditch High Street to get to Hoxton (it's one stop). No doubt you'll be glued to your smartphone to navigate this trip. I was, and I can recommend the app Citymapper in particular. Liverpool Street is the nearest main-line train station to this circuit.

DIGGING FOR VICTORY

Mark O'Shaughnessy recalls separating the rare jazz from the jazz mags during a one-off vinyl haul in Toronto

I used to go digging in North America three or four times a year during most of the 90s/early noughties, often with mixed results. By 1998, I'd already been to Montreal several times before, so I thought I'd give Toronto a whirl. It was still a relatively unknown digging outpost; compared to Toronto, with its towering skyscrapers and sprawling city centre, Montreal felt like a village. There were still lots of vinyl stores open in Toronto then, including chains that have now gone out of business. It was from one of these stores that we ended up going on one of *the* craziest digs of my mining career…

It was around 10am one weekday, early on in the dig, and my companion this time was a chap called Angus, with whom I have sadly now lost touch… hi, Angus! I began absentmindedly listening in to a conversation going on at the counter between an extremely disinterested clerk and an equally animated punter. It ran like this: "I want to sell up, I've had it with rekkids, I got over 100,000 of the suckers over at my mum's place and she wants the space back, goddamn things just cluttering up the house…" Either the clerk had heard it all before, or he just didn't care to get involved and eventually, the guy just scuttled off. I shot out after him.

He was just putting his beaten-up Dodge pickup into reverse when I rapped on the window. He was one of the most bizarre-looking geezers I'd ever seen. He was a good 6' 6" tall, with only one tooth left in his whole mouth – and his breath would have felled a cart horse. We got talking and it turned out that he lived out in the boondocks, 40-plus miles away. Damn! He still insisted that he wanted to sell the whole lot, 100,000 records. He wouldn't tell me what was in there, nor how much he actually wanted for them, but seemed keen for me to go there as soon as he realised I was from Lun'nun (which I actually wasn't, of course…). Thinking fast, I agreed I might be up for buying him out and got his address, agreeing to go there next morning – although God only knew how we were going to get there. It was time to call in some reinforcements.

I'd become friendly with a local shop owner the day before, so I ran down to his store and he agreed to take us there. He also wanted to bring along his buddy, so then we were four. We arrived at this guy's mum's house early next morning. What our boy failed to tell us was that, alongside the huge vinyl collection, he had an equally mammoth pornography habit! The house was divided into two: top floor = vinyl, ground floor = porn. He must have had 10,000 dirty videos! I was literally speechless. And the maddest thing about it all was that his mum's bedroom was on the porn floor, and it, too, was (literally) racked out with hundreds of mucky videos. The plot then thickened. We combed the whole house over the course of the day and, as night fell, we came together to compare our finds. The records were all pristine, a lot of them sealed, an unusual occurrence in the late 90s… But, nothing was priced. Then, our host informed us that we had to make offers on the records individually, one buyer at a time. If he felt the price was right, he'd sell us the record, but if we got the prices wrong, the record went back into the racks – no exceptions. Then, he told us that we were to sit in a decommissioned dentist's chair, one by one, to make our bids!

By this time, our Canadian colleagues were ready to run out of the door, but we Brits were made of sterner stuff than that, so the pricing lottery began. My companion Gus went first and fell flat on his face. He was a hip-hop head and had pulled out some absolute bangers, à la sealed Axelrod LPs, Gary Bartz on Capitol, a few Strata-Easts… he'd hit the jackpot, or so he thought.

But, in his drive to ensure he nailed these amazing records, he offered too high on a few of them. Our guy just blew a gasket and then turned down nearly all of Gus's subsequent bids. There was no rhyme nor reason – turning down high bids and accepting lower bids? Gus walked away with only about 60 of the 200-odd items that he'd pulled, sick as a parrot. One of the Canadians went next, toned his offers down a bit and managed to get most of what he'd wanted.

I'd more or less worked out this barking-mad guy's pricing methodology. He accepted 99% of my offers and I walked away with nearly 1,000 NM/M LPs, one of my best-ever North American hauls: some absolutely incredible jazz, some rarely seen funk and loads and loads of incredible soul LPs. Hard work, but so, so worth it… One of the LPs in there was then in huge demand at home – *The Deirdre Wilson Tabac* on RCA – and I dug out 22 sealed copies in the Porno Vinyl Palace that day, whole trip paid for with those 22 LPs alone. Guess what? His mum didn't bat an eyelid all day. ●

Mark O'Shaughnessy is the owner of Bath record shop Resolution Records and a professional record dealer since 1993

Omerta Inc.

Long Live Vinyl meets a pair of Londoners who are putting out-of-print hip-hop classics, mixtapes and more modern fare on vinyl and in the hands of the fans… **Chris Parkin** finds out how they manage to run the label in their spare time

From DJ Kool Herc spinning the first breaks in mid-70s New York to J Dilla and Madlib sampling more records than most people listen to in a lifetime, hip-hop is inextricably linked with vinyl. It's something of a paradox, then, that so much of it – both classic and contemporary – is absent from the racks. London hip-hop obsessives Sam Gilbert and James Batsford are helping to rectify this with their Omerta Inc. label.

"There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason for it," Batsford says. "I'm not sure if it's to do with the costs associated with vinyl, or the bigger artists doing so well digitally, that vinyl is an afterthought. Frank Ocean's *Channel Orange* didn't come out on vinyl until two years after release, and a bootleg version sold an insane amount. It's the same with Kanye's *Yeezus* and *The Life Of Pablo*. With the rise in vinyl sales, it just seemed like an obvious time to offer something like we are."

It might seem like an incongruous idea – two young Londoners picking up the baton dropped by the major hip-hop labels – but Batsford and Gilbert are perfect candidates for the role of hip-hop re-appraisers. They grew up listening to 50 Cent, Ludacris and The Game, and, in the early- to mid-00s, would schlep over to Camden to pick up the latest hip-hop mixtapes. Crucially, they already work in the music industry. So, after discussing doing the improbable, and inspired by hip-hop labels Death Row and Cash Money and the aesthetics of non-rap labels Sacred Bones and Numero, they decided to get on with the job.

"We work on the periphery of the genre, but from our experience, it's been pretty straightforward," Batsford says. "There have been teething problems and some managers aren't as easy to deal with as others, but that's part of the joy. We're fans of everyone we've worked with; that's what makes us unique. These guys want to get their music on vinyl, too, so they're usually pretty sound."

Running things in their spare time, Batsford and Gilbert have dived headfirst into one of the most hardcore areas of contemporary hip-hop: trap. Since setting up Omerta Inc. in January, they've reissued music by the artists who created the sound, including Three 6 Mafia, the rapper who tells everyone he invented trap, T.I., and two of its biggest stars, Future and Gucci Mane. For older hip-hop heads, they've also put out Big Daddy Kane's 1988 debut and Kool G Rap and DJ Polo's 1989 classic, *Road To The Riches*.

Batsford and Gilbert aren't resting on their laurels. They're also releasing music by new artists, such as Cousin Stizz, and ramping up their reissue ambitions. "Young Thug and Gucci Mane are two of the best of the last 10 years," Batsford says. "It would be amazing to collect the first 10 *Guwop* tapes and put them in an insane boxset, sort of like Jack White's Paramount one. Just go all-out for the trap connoisseurs out there!" ●

WE'RE FANS OF EVERYONE WE'VE WORKED WITH… THESE GUYS WANT TO GET THEIR MUSIC ON VINYL, TOO, SO THEY'RE USUALLY PRETTY SOUND

The Smiths

THE QUEEN IS DEAD DELUXE EDITION

RHINO

Morrissey says: "You have good taste, thank you," to the applauding crowd as The Smiths wind up a sprightly romp through *Cemetry Gates*, taken from a previously unreleased live show recorded in Boston from 1986. The entire live show is included as part of this Deluxe CD/vinyl boxset, which also includes a fresh remaster of their classic 1986 album and a slew of unreleased demos of the songs from the same record. "Don't pretend. You didn't like it, don't pretend…" Morrissey then indignantly crows after *Is It Really So Strange?*, just one song later.

This dichotomy of self-pity and ego captures a snapshot of where Morrissey was in 1986, although it could be argued he has remained in such a contrary state ever since. However, this beautiful amalgamation between theatrical forlornness and proud grandstanding is what led Morrissey and The Smiths to create one of their – and the decade's – finest records.

The Smiths, in the opinion of detractors, are a group that have become synonymous with misery and wimpy introversion. Yet in raging opposition to such a state is where the group truly stood. The album opener, *The Queen Is Dead*, is a song that sprints out of the starting blocks with a charge, bite and menace that matches many of the 1980s post-punk groups whose MO was the savage and scratchy guitar attack.

Marr hacks away at his guitar with a force that constantly wrestles

ROURKE AND JOYCE'S RHYTHM SECTION JOYOUSLY POUNCES AND SKIPS THROUGH THESE SONGS; MARR'S MELODIES ARE JUST EYE-WATERING SUNRISE AFTER EYE-WATERING SUNRISE, AS MORRISSEY WRAPS HIS WORDS AROUND IT ALL WITH BALLERINA LEVELS OF FLEXIBILITY AND GRACE

between grace and malevolence, Mike Joyce slams through drum fill after drum fill and Andy Rourke's chugging bass powers the song through to a climactic close as the keys create a dense, brooding atmosphere. It manages to encapsulate everything that is strange, beautiful and powerful about The Smiths in one song – a burst of ferocious melancholy.

The Smiths could do ravaged noise and thundering rhythms easily, the fact is they knew what was easy and they went beyond, beneath and through it. *I Know It's Over*, over 30 years on from its creation, still stands as a single piece of music like no other. The tangible imagery that Morrissey creates through the lyrics of: "Mother, I can feel the soil falling over my head" is so powerful and effective in its delivery that the weight of rich, wet, thick brown earth can almost be felt crushing the skull of the listener through the speaker.

The following *Never Had No One Ever* is a stunning example of how the demos justify a place on this extended release, elevating it beyond another tasteless and unnecessary reissue. As the steady groove of the song begins to diminish, it does so through an elongated stretch of tooting brass and with Morrissey manically letting out more audible and crisp bursts of laughter than on the album version. The layered production of sultry sax, coupled with a bordering-on-creepy Moz, creates something altogether unheard of in other Smiths material. It gives a vital and integral insight into the songwriting and construction process of these songs – it being one example of many little glimpses into that world that this package delivers.

Another such example comes at the end of a seamless acoustic version of *Bigmouth Strikes Again*, as the song collapses into a fluffed finish. "Mike dropped a stick," says someone, most likely Rourke, as Johnny Marr follows up in his thick Mancunian accent clearly brimming with energy after the take, asking: "When did you drop it, near the end? Oh, that was great."

It's an utterly banal exchange without context, but this little interaction, as Marr fizzes with positivity, feels like a privilege to hear unfold when you know the outcome that these sessions led to.

THE OTHER TWO

The Smiths have, incredibly unfairly, often been reduced to a Marr-and-Morrissey band over the years, but Rourke and Joyce's rhythm section joyously pounces and skips throughout these songs, never sounding anything other than vital. Marr's melodies are just eye-watering sunrise after eye-watering sunrise, as Morrissey wraps his words around it all with ballerina levels of flexibility, fluidity and grace. This package doesn't pinpoint or single out any individuals in their brilliance, it only reinforces their collective skill, which, over the 30-plus tracks, often reaches breathtaking levels.

The inclusion of *The Queen Is Dead*-era B-sides such as *Asleep* only serves to further illustrate how powerful a force the group were at the time. The heart-wrenching piano-led number would've been a stop-you-in-your-tracks highlight on most people's albums from the era, but here, the almost discarded nature of the track, slid in among the A-sides, only seems to give it a more profound stature. Alongside another standout B-side from the group's career, *Please, Please, Please, Let Me Get What I Want* (not included here), it perches proudly as a rousing monument to what a creative frenzy the quartet were in during this period.

INDIE ROYALTY

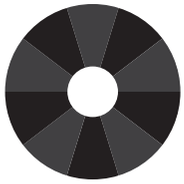
Aside from pushing the demos and the live recordings, this release succeeds in further elevating the status of a record that many would think incapable of ascending any higher. Each accompanying and extra asset fits seamlessly into a period of time that captures such a rare, potent and electric synergy of music being made. There's not a whiff of the dated, nostalgic or obsolete about this release. When the glistening strums and melodies of *The Boy With The Thorn In His Side* begin, they glide like wriggling snakes, moving gracefully through wet grass; the ever-soaring *There Is A Light That Never Goes Out* seems to reach new heights with every chord progression, pitch-shift and vocal inflection.

Even the mildly preposterous lyrics of *Some Girls Are Bigger Than Others* feel as if they can be carried forward into eternity by the guitar work from Marr, which sparkles like an ocean of glitter. In 2017, Morrissey may still be calling for the abolition of the monarchy via his upcoming album artwork, but his original announcement of its death still packs an indelible punch.

Daniel Dylan Wray

VERDICT

10/10



Emerson, Lake & Palmer

FANFARE (1970–1997)

BMG

When Keith Emerson, Greg Lake and Carl Palmer first dreamed up the idea of ELP in 1970, there can be little doubt vinyl was their vision. Envisaging the epic tales of *Fanfare For The Common Man* or *Lucky Man* on 8-Track would have just been less, well, manly. So it's the vinyl elements of this high-end box that really shine. Put the 11 CD albums to one side, park the CDs of five previously unreleased concerts and instead, lift your needle ready for the gatefold triple vinyl featuring two live Italian concerts from May 1973.

The other vinyl elements – two 7" singles of the aforementioned *Lucky Man* and *Fanfare...* – are simply replicas of the UK editions, 'reproduced original sleeve artwork' and all, offering nothing new to the sort of rock fan that buys a £150-plus boxset such as this. So, after the live album, dive straight into the (again, previously released) audio Blu-ray Surround Sound mixes of *Trilogy* and *Brain Salad Surgery*, both of which are a testament to prog everyman Jakko Jakszyk's masterful remastering. *Ian Peel*

VERDICT

8/10

The Style Council

CONFESSIONS OF A POP GROUP/MODERNISM

UNIVERSAL

Another month, another two Style Council reissues. The summer was just beginning when *Introducing...* and *Café Bleu* got their vinyl reissues, and it was at its height when *Our Favourite Shop* and *The Cost Of Loving* appeared. Now it's autumn and, appropriately enough, we reach the twilight years of the group. But they're also their most daring, musically. Witness the nine-minute wonderland – or rather *A Three Piece Suite*, as they called it – of *The Gardener Of Eden*, which sits comfortably alongside the group's last great single, *Life At A Top Peoples Health Farm*.

Confessions Of A Pop Group is reissued on white vinyl along with a yellow edition of the group's last album, the initially rejected *Modernism* which, annoyingly, is yet to arrive on Spotify (other than as part of the cumbersome, six-volume Classic Album Selection). But yellow vinyl is a far more appropriate format for an LP that straddles deep house and acid jazz, and contains lost club hits such as *Sure Is Sure* and *That Spiritual Feeling*. *Modernism* is subtitled *A New Decade;* it's rather quaint to look back at the optimism of late-80s albums and remember how wide-eyed many artists were. *Ian Peel*

VERDICT

8/10

Ian Dury

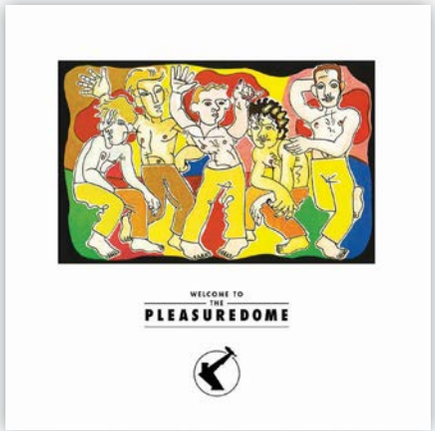
NEW BOOTS AND PANTIES!!

RHINO

Funk, rock, poetry, and swearing. Without the latter, ex pub-rocker Dury might perhaps not have surfed the punk wave so successfully, but it's the masterful former that gives *New Boots...* its staying power. First released 40 years ago by Stiff, it manages to sound both of its time and completely timeless. But does a10-track classic warrant a £55 re-release? If you want artifact, then you're sorted: a hardcover book houses the album on lovely clear vinyl, liner notes by über-fan Phil Jupitus – plus four CDs containing three fabulous *Peel Session* versions of album tracks, and a killer version of *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll* – all new to this writer, and 17 demos found previously on Demon's 2004 re-release. There's also a BBC live show from 1977. When *Sex & Drugs...* flopped, Stiff immediately deleted it. Fans phoned up asking for copies, and were told: "We're a record company, not a museum." 40 years on, some might say it's often hard to tell the difference. *Ben Wardle*

VERDICT

7/10



Frankie Goes To Hollywood

WELCOME TO THE PLEASUREDOME

BMG

Provoking BBC and MTV bans, Frankie's sprawling 1984 double-album debut exhibited an appetite for controversy unseen since the Sex Pistols. The Liverpudlians paired it, however, with Trevor Horn's immaculate production, which helped send their first three flawless singles to the top. Alongside *Relax*, *Two Tribes* and *The Power Of Love*, the title track's decadence remains the highlight, overshadowing more self-indulgent missteps, such as a cover of Bacharach's *...San Jose* and the gauche *Wish (The Lads Were Here)*. There are other devilish moments, though, not least the late-Floyd-ish, porn-film-sampling *The Ballad Of 32* and *Two Tribes*' thematic sidekick, a sly, deconstructed cover of Edwin Starr's *War*. Sadly, though, things changed the moment Band Aid knocked *The Power Of Love* from the top of the charts: "Pop was previously the reserve of the ne'erdowells. Now it was the turn of the evangelists to take over." *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

8/10

Barenaked Ladies

GORDON

RHINO

Despite the fact that it's now reached its 25th-anniversary milestone, the Barenaked Ladies' debut album has never thus far enjoyed a vinyl edition. So here it is, better late than never, as a double on 180g. The press release trumpets the fact that *Gordon* "features several fan favourites, including *Be My Yoko Ono*, *Brian Wilson*, *Blame It On Me* and *If I Had $1000000*". In fact, those four tracks are easily the highlights of the entire set, mixing the wry and the humorous, while other songs fall too far either way: *Hello City* too upbeat, *The Flag* (in the verse at least) overpoweringly heavy.

But what the press release doesn't acknowledge is that those four lead tracks (in that precise order) were released a few months prior to *Gordon*, in the UK, as an eponymous debut EP (also sometimes known as 'The Sandwich EP'), but with different mixes and takes that have never been reissued. The perfect opportunity for some bonus tracks has been missed. *Ian Peel*

VERDICT

7/10

LONG LIVE VINYL CHOICE

Leroy Hutson

ANTHOLOGY 1972–84

ACID JAZZ

Leroy Hutson is one of R&B/soul's best-kept secrets and his bafflingly low profile in the UK is in no way commensurate to the high quality of his smooth, sweetly soulful, immaculately arranged recordings. Succession-planning may not actually have existed in the early 70s, but if it was, then Curtis Mayfield was an early adopter, as the *Super Fly* giant handpicked the young Leroy Hutson as his replacement as the main man in the legendary Impressions.

Under Mayfield's tutelage, the Newark-born singer made a seamless transition to centre stage before embarking on a recording career of his own. It's these highly regarded albums for Chicago's Curtom label that are collected on this career-spanning compilation. Mid-70s classics such as *Lucky Fellow*, *Love Oh Love* and *Love The Feeling* demonstrate why Hutson continues to be revered by soul-collecting fanatics. *Gary Tipp*

VERDICT

9/10

Basement 5

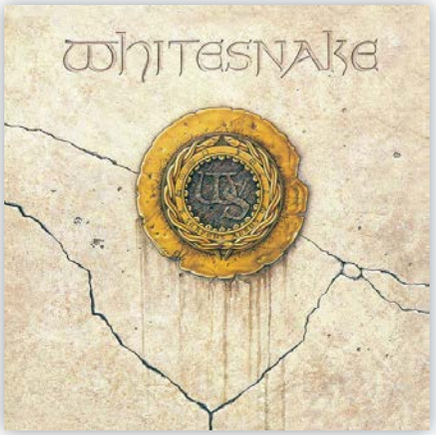
1965–1980

PIAS

Talk about learning from the best. As a teenager, Dennis Morris was the trusted on-the-road photographer for both Bob Marley and the Sex Pistols, before becoming the creative force behind Basement 5. In an early incarnation, Don Letts was the man behind the mic – but under Morris's art direction, the band mutated into a politically charged ball of dub-infused, post-punk fury. The task of translating the outfit's powerful-yet-raw live performances onto a black slab of vinyl was given to Martin Hannett of Joy Division fame. It proved to be no easy task ("It has been the most physical album I've ever done"), but out from under the heavy smoke of the screechingly fractured guitar noise and the heavy bass rumblings, he helped to shape a convincing and authentic album. A dub version, *In Dub*, is also available on vinyl for the first time since its release in 1980. *Gary Tipp*

VERDICT

8/10



Whitesnake

1987

RHINO

1987's popularity – over nine million sales and counting – led to David Coverdale being (unfairly) maligned for its commerciality. The LP is a heady mix of eight new songs and a couple of reimagined older album tracks – US No. 1 single *Here I Go Again '87* and the brooding *Crying In The Rain*. While Coverdale and his co-writer, guitarist John Sykes, stay faithful to the singer's bluesy Deep Purple roots on tracks such as *Looking For Love*, they also ramp up the macho innuendo on songs such as *Bad Boys* and tug at the heart strings with the power ballad *Is This Love*. The standout track is opener *Still Of The Night* – which has a vocal screech that even Robert Plant would be proud of.

Although not as expansive as the four-CD and DVD package, this 30th Anniversary Edition (containing new remixes and never-before-heard live tracks) has *1987* sounding clearer and louder than ever, in true Spinal Tap, all-the-way-to-11 style. *Alex Duce*

VERDICT

7/10

Talk Talk

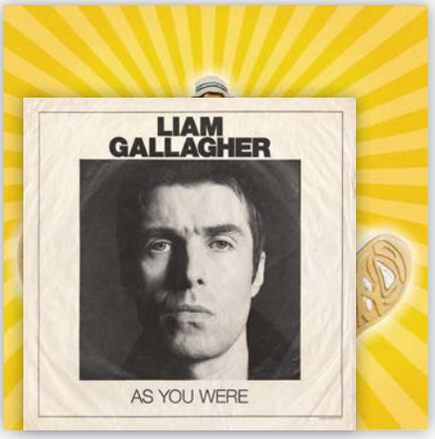
THE PARTY'S OVER/ IT'S MY LIFE

PARLOPHONE

Though significantly more commercially successful, Talk Talk's first two albums are nowadays eclipsed by their final two, which – to many – remain radical, unsurpassed masterpieces. Nonetheless, 1982's *The Party's Over* and 1984's *It's My Life* established the band's ear for a mournful melody, Mark Hollis' peculiar voice soaring over synth-pop landscapes that provoked EMI to promote them as Duran Duran's natural heirs. Certainly, the likes of their debut's *Talk Talk*, *Another Word* and *Have You Heard The News?* deserved the comparison and *Today* earned them their first Top 20 hit, but there was something more pensive about its grandiose title track and the slow-motion closer, *Candy*. The follow-up, too, was more ambitious – from the extreme dynamics of *Dum Dum Girl* to the sparse melancholy of *Renee* – yet left space for the euphoric title track, the complexity of *Call In The Night Boy* and *Such A Shame*'s delicious anguish and enduring keys riff. *Wyndham Wallace*

VERDICT

8/10



Liam Gallagher

AS YOU WERE

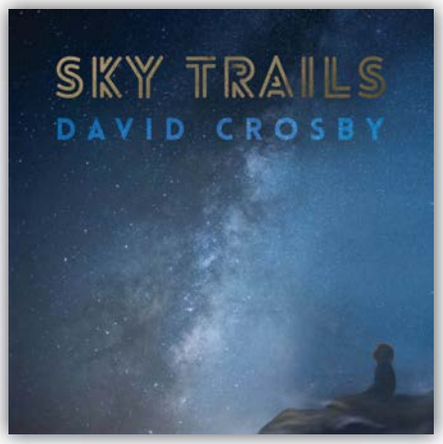
WARNER BROS

You write off Liam Gallagher at your peril. The much-maligned Beady Eye may not have set the world alight, but this solo debut is everything you could reasonably hope for. His fiery return to the fray via the spiky *Wall Of Glass* positively spits with attitude, while the introspective *Bold* seems to reflect on recent personal problems.

There's plenty of attitude to the unreconstitued rawk of *Greedy Soul,* and the lighters-in-the-air balladry of *For What It's Worth* is surely an attempt to hold out an olive branch to Noel. Naysayers will no doubt baulk at a few eyebrow-raising lyrics, but it's a hard heart that won't be impressed by the melodic nous of *Chinatown*'s impressive chorus. In fact, Liam's rarely been in better voice over the last 20 years or so and seems to have regained his upper register. There's no pretence of reinventing the rock 'n' roll wheel here, but the quality of the material makes us thankful Liam hasn't packed in music to flog Pretty Green parkas all day. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

8/10



David Crosby

SKY TRAILS

BMG

David Crosby's stop-start solo career has gathered unexpected pace in the autumn of his years – *Sky Trails* is his third studio effort since 2014. The former Byrd's jazzier influences are often to the fore here, especially on the slinky Herbie-Hancock-meets-Steely-Dan-style opener *She's Got To Be Somewhere*. A relaxed mood dominates the album for the most part, but two sparky, politically charged centrepieces steal the honours – *Sell Me A Diamond* muses on a pacifist alternative to conflict gems, while the impressive *Capitol* takes potshots at the shallowness of Washington's political movers and shakers, Crosby sounding livid at the injustice of the US electoral system. The pretty, balladeering title track reasserts his folky acoustic roots and *Home Free* celebrates the comfort of domesticity. CSN and CSNY may have seemingly hit the buffers for good, but Crosby on his lonesome can still deliver the goods... the sky's the limit. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

7/10

Philip Selway

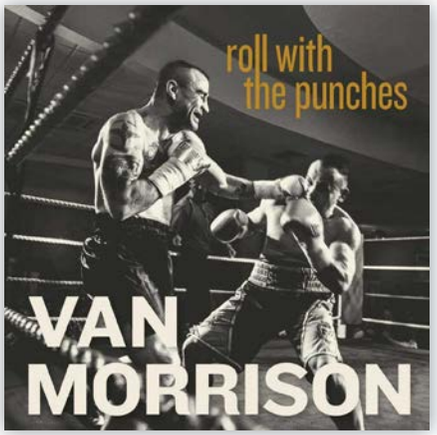
LET ME GO OST

BELLA UNION

The 26th Greatest Drummer Of All Time earned this accolade from *Gigwise* for providing ever-more sophisticated rhythms for Radiohead, but he's also released two decent solo albums – 2010's folky *Familial* and 2014's shadowier *Weatherhouse*. The focus of his new solo record differs, however, in that it's a soundtrack to UK drama *Let Me Go*, the story of a woman whose mother abandoned her to work in Auschwitz. Blending strings, piano, guitar, occasional bass and drums, eerily vocal musical saw, bowed vibraphone, glockenspiel and electronic sounds, 11 of the 14 tracks here are instrumental; the rest are mournful ballads featuring vocals from Selway and Lou Rhodes of Lamb. The piano-and-strings-based title track and *Walk* are the most Radiohead-esque in terms of progression, rhythm and feel, but overall, this series of artful, varied and economical compositions adds up to a ghostly winter soundtrack with a lingering aura. *Owen Bailey*

VERDICT

7/10



Van Morrison

ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES

CAROLINE INTERNATIONAL P&D

On 1974's overlooked gem *Veedon Fleece*, Van Morrison sang *You Don't Pull No Punches, But You Do Push The River*. It's a sprawling, unravelling and jittering-yet-fluid track that grows and builds, and dips and dives, resulting in one of Morrison's finest ever pieces of work. Contrastingly, as Morrison approaches album number 40 with *Roll With The Punches* in 2017, he slips into a mode that's fitting of the title, retreating into the old and familiar, as soul-drenched blues and breezy melodies fill the album with pleasant, if slightly uninspired, songs.

Morrison's voice remains in good shape for its age, and in use, he still pushes and plays with it, stretching out elongated tones as well as spitting out short sharp bursts and letting quiet murmurs linger. Tracks such as *Transformation* prove he's still capable of unsettling beauty from time to time, among the more standard fare on offer. *Daniel Dylan Wray*

VERDICT

6/10

The White Buffalo

DARKEST DARKS, LIGHTEST LIGHTS

EARACHE

Jake Smith, aka The White Buffalo, opens his latest with *Hide And Seek*, a jaunty honky-tonk, boozy starter for a truly beguiling sixth full-length. It's no surprise, given the title, that this is a record of light and shade: *Avalon* rocks like a Chuck Ragan number; *Robbery* oozes outlaw cool, swinging with a Tom Waits jazz rhythm; *The Heart And Soul Of The Night* has a Phil-Lynott-meets-Tom-Petty strut; and *Madam's Soft, Madam's Sweet* evokes the sorrowful ghosts of bluesmen past. It's all deep-rooted stuff, delivered with dust-bowl grit. Smith's vocals are sublime and album highlights come when he slows things down a notch, delivering a bourbon-soaked take on baritone blues with *If I Lost My Eyes*, *I Am The Moon* and the soul-searching *The Observatory*. A dark delight. *Dan Biggane*

VERDICT

8/10

LONG LIVE VINYL CHOICE

Michael Head

ADIÓS SEÑOR PUSSYCAT

VIOLETTE RECORDS

Michael Head's story is a painfully familiar one. Another dazzlingly gifted songwriter hamstrung by label strife, wobbly band line-ups, drug problems and a fickle public disinterested in limelight-averse geniuses in scuffed trainers. But Head's tender songs, which filter Love's ominous psychedelic pop through the bittersweet melodicism innate in Liverpool's most gifted, remain treasures to pass on to friends, lovers and strangers alike. Head's nearest miss was with Shack's 1999 album *H.M.S. Fable*, but his most affecting record is *The Magical World Of The Strands*, released in 1997 with zero fanfare and reissued on vinyl in 2015. Head's first new album for 11 years matches that – and last year's 7" *Velvets In The Dark* – for heart-bruising romance and bone-weary brilliance. Hearing the album's gentle, brass-assisted songs and evocative truths is like being reunited with long-lost friends laden with important wisdom. *Chris Parkin*

VERDICT

9/10

Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith

THE KID

WESTERN VINYL

Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith's *EARS*, released last year, is an album of bubbling, spaced-out soundscapes crafted on a rare Buchla Music Easel. Since then, she's created what looks like a mad synth-player's laboratory and run off into deep space with the ideas we first heard on *EARS*. Sprawled over a double LP, with twilight-coloured vinyl, *The Kid* is a sonic exposition of the "four defining cognitive and emotional stages of the human lifespan". What does that sound like? An experimental affair, which pitches up between Jon Hassell's 'fourth world' electronica, Fever Ray's existential synth-pop and Animal Collective at their nature-sampling best. And with playful percussive ticks, experimental looped vocals and a sound that swings from bright evocations of new life to autumnal melancholy, *The Kid* bears repeated listens. *Chris Parkin*

VERDICT

8/10

Lankum

BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE SKY

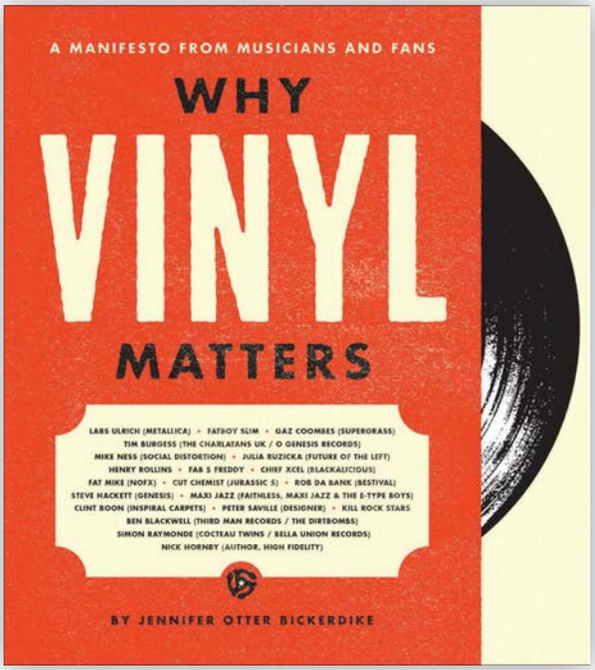
ROUGH TRADE

Originally called Lynched, these 'folk miscreants' shook the streets of Dublin throughout 2016 with a self-released cult hit, *Cold Old Fire* – which in turn won them a deal with Rough Trade. Although the band's founding brothers go by the name of Lynch, complaints from Black Lives Matter forced them to adopt a new name – Lankum, a character from a gypsy ballad. From a timeless world of dead poets and dog-rough suburbs, theirs is a strange brew of drones, harmonies and full-flavoured Dublin tang. Think The Pogues, the McGarrigle sisters, Flann O'Brien, Ken Loach, and ancient Irish séan nos on Appalachian mushrooms.

Literary, shamanic and redefining hipness, Lankum are Dublin's most poignant happening in recent times. Mixing new and old gems such as *The Granite Gaze* and *The Turkish Reveille*, this new double album continues their excavation of past and present. Take note, folks, all early signals are pointing to classic status. *Gareth Murphy*

VERDICT

8/10



Why Vinyl Matters

JENNIFER OTTER BICKERDIKE

ACC EDITIONS

Dr Jennifer Otter Bickerdike called upon a lifetime devoted to music in producing this sincere and thorough love letter to vinyl. From being inspired as a 12-year-old by The Go-Go's to heading up marketing at a major label and writing a doctorate on music fandom, Bickerdike's all-consuming passion for music is obvious. As she puts it in her preface: "I wanted it to be not just my story, but the story of the heroes and crusaders I admired, loved and have been inspired by."

Following a well-researched scene-setting history of vinyl, the book consists of a series of interviews with prominent figures from all corners of the music business. Otter Bickerdike's contacts book is impressively stocked – among those she interviews are Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich, Fatboy Slim, Henry Rollins, Tim Burgess, Nick Hornby, Third Man Records' Ben Blackwell, Simon Raymonde and Beggars Banquet founder Martin Mills. It's an impressive cast, all of whom open up to the author's disarming line of questioning. *Gary Walker*

VERDICT

9/10

Love That Burns

MICK FLEETWOOD

GENESIS PUBLICATIONS

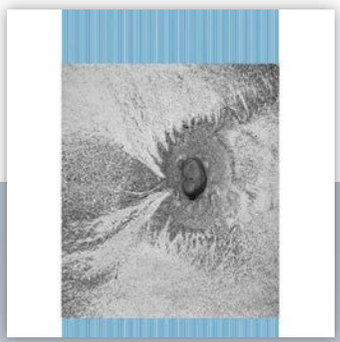
It would perhaps be overstating the case to say that the early blues years of Fleetwood Mac are now overlooked, but the lion's share of attention no doubt remains on the *Rumours* era of multi-million sales, coke binges and romantic shenanigans. Mick Fleetwood has already written an autobiography and put his name to several picture-led tomes. This is the Mac motherlode, though; at least for the pre-Buckingham and Nicks period. This lavish limited-edition coffee-table package contains more than 400 rare images and contributions from Peter Green, Christine and John McVie and Jeremy Spencer. Fleetwood's photos show an idyllic Bohemian early life, before he moves on to stints in fledgling bands such as The Cheynes, Shotgun Express and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Two-thirds of the book is then taken up with Fleetwood's work with the mercurial Green. As well as on-the-road shots, studio pics and tour itineries, the post-Green "commune years" show how this tight-knit bunch managed to overcome the ups and downs of their successes and failures. Only 2,000 copies will be available, each signed by Fleetwood himself. With prices starting at £325, they don't come cheap, but for the Mac hardcore, they'll be a fine addition to the band's legacy. *Steve Harnell*

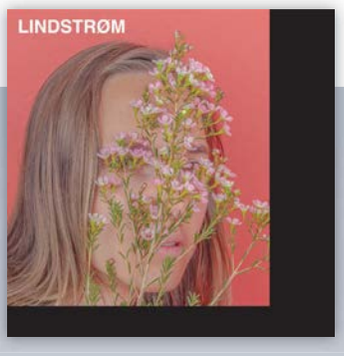
VERDICT

8/10

Genre Hopping Electronica

Each issue, **Chris Parkin** uncovers the latest gems in a particular genre. This month, he rounds up some electronic treasures to tempt you away from your indie-rock collection





Remarkable as it might be, there are still people who sniffily reject electronic music because it isn't "proper". By which they mean it's not Oasis or The Stone Roses or something. But durr, it's 2017. Music has been electronic for decades – and here are a few standout vinyl releases that knock the output of most indie-rock bands into a cocked hat.

One of this year's finest albums, in any genre, is Kelly Lee Owens' debut for Norway's Smalltown Supersound. Almost out of nowhere – well, Wrexham, actually – Owens has delivered an album of sylvan dream-techno that owes a debt to her time singing in choirs as well as a stint working alongside acid revivalist Daniel Avery at XL Recordings. Its songs drip with emotion as its drones and oscillations shift nimbly between the spaced-out *Anxi* and a ghostly, melodic tribute to Arthur Russell. Also on Smalltown Supersound is space-disco pioneer Lindstrøm. His albums with Prins Thomas were retrofuturistic affairs with a slowed-down motorik chug and a velvet touch. Lindstrøm stepped away from all of that on 2012 albums *Smalhans* and *Six Cups Of Rebel*, honing a harder-edged electronica, and his 2015 collaboration with Todd Rundgren is a bonkers racket. But *It's Alright Between Us As It Is* lives up to the promise of last year's space-disco epic *Closing Shot*. It's a cosmic wonder split into nine tracks of arpeggio-disco, segueing into one dizzying piece.

Four Tet is keeping up a similar pace. Kieran Hebden's 2015 album *Morning/Evening* was inspired by his grandfather's collection of devotional Hindu music and is the best thing he's ever done. *New Energy* brings those ideas onto the dancefloor. It's a sprawling double LP of deconstructed electronic ragas, the influence of spiritual jazz and epic, meditative techno and ambience.

KELLY LEE OWENS' SONGS DRIP WITH EMOTION AS THEIR OSCILLATIONS SHIFT BETWEEN THE SPACED-OUT *ANXI* AND A GHOSTLY TRIBUTE TO ARTHUR RUSSELL

Thrill Jockey's Colleen is very different. For her past few albums, the French musician has played her trusty viola da gamba, cutting up its melodies and doing weird things with them to create beautiful sound worlds. It's all change on *A Flame My Love, A Frequency*, recorded live with pocket synths and Moog effect pedals in the wake of the terror attacks on Paris in November 2015. Colleen's songs are as delicate as ever, but her dazzling melodies are replaced with muted, melancholy chiming and a ghostly sound redolent of Roedelius's beautiful *Selbstportrait* albums.

Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe's hypnotic, time-bending albums *Two Orb Reel*, *Marlek* and *Khultan* are vital new releases, just like Glitterbeat's reissue of Jon Hassell's essential album, *Dream Theory In Malaya*. Consciously or not, many of the artists mentioned above share a similar soundspace with the Brian Eno collaborator, whose idea of 'fourth world' music – primitive, pan-global, exploratory electronica – is in full intoxicating effect on this 1981 album. ●

AUDIO-TECHNICA AT-LP3

FULLY AUTOMATIC BUDGET TURNTABLE

£199 *eu.audio-technica.com 01132 771441*

Paul Rigby gives this sub-budget turntable from a venerable hi-fi brand a full review, and experiences a feeling of déjà vu…

When money is low and a turntable is in your sights, it might be tempting to plump for one of those shiny turntables you might see advertised in the Sunday supplements. Don't do it – badly built turntables can ruin your vinyl collection.

Riding to save our sub-budget lives are a number of brands who have been a bit more selective in terms of design. Yes, they're built in China, often by Hanpin, but some of these turntables – often featuring brand-requested tweaks – ain't half bad. They're certainly usable, at any rate. Audio-Technica is aiming at this market sector with the LP3, a slightly tweaked variant of the same basic turntable utilised by Dual on its MTR-75. The LP3 is a bit heavier, maybe due to extra damping: a good thing, in terms of reducing internal vibration.

Offering a hinged lid, belt drive and two speeds, the LP3 is fully automatic, so you don't have to touch the arm during the deck's operation. An AT91R cartridge (set at a 2g downforce) is included, along with an attractive red,

SME-type, AT-HS3 removable head shell featuring a built-in finger lift. A serviceable design, but upgrading as soon as possible from its conical stylus to a cartridge with an elliptical stylus will vastly improve detail retrieval.

The cartridge is fitted to a straight tonearm that features a rest but, disappointingly, has no safety catch in case of accidental knocks. A built-in phono amplifier will save you money if your amplifier doesn't feature a phono amplifier or if you just wish to plug your turntable into a pair of powered speakers. Be aware that built-in phono amplifiers add 'masking' noise to the music, though. If you purchase the LP, upgrade to an external phono amp as soon as you can.

OPTIONAL EXTRA

A rear-mounted switch allows you to toggle between moving-magnet cartridges (such as the one supplied) and a moving-coil variant. The latter generally sound superior, but are more expensive (decent models can be yours at £250 and upwards) and demand a high-quality turntable to be mounted upon – something much higher in quality and price terms than the LP3. This option is not only unnecessary, but takes up build budget that may have been better invested in other components.

Other features include a damped arm lift, die-cast aluminium platter, 4.5mm rubber platter mat and an all-in weight of 5.2kg. The front-mounted power button is joined by the On and Off operation buttons, a top-mounted 7" and 12" disc selector for the automatic system, rear-mounted phono or line switch plus RCA sockets and a figure-of-eight power chord. The power block is fitted to the plinth underside. Internally fitted power supplies will only add further noise to the music.

The internal phono-amplifier sound output is usable and will get any analogue fan underway, but the sound is a little indistinct in the midrange and muffled at the bottom end.

External phono-amp sound quality improved a lot. On jazz vocals, despite a bright tone on crescendos, the LP3 did offer plenty of energy and vigour and a sense of passion. On high-energy post-punk, the blooming bass and smearing midrange held slightly less sway and importance. The evident musicality of the LP3 rose to prominence here, allowing the ear to just enjoy the performance and the passion behind the presentation.

Despite the sonic issues, this low-cost turntable provides a wealth of features and, in sub-budget terms, is put together fairly well. The automatic-play system works perfectly and the internal phono amplifier is a money saver. As such, therefore, the Audio-Technica AT-LP3 is a solid turntable. ●

ON JAZZ VOCALS, DESPITE A BRIGHT TONE ON CRESCENDOS, THE AT-LP3 DID OFFER PLENTY OF ENERGY AND VIGOUR AND A SENSE OF PASSION

VERDICT

PROS	CONS
AUTOMATIC PLAY	NO TONEARM
EASY TO USE	SAFETY LATCH
FREE PHONO AMP	BRIGHT UPPER MIDS
VALUE FOR MONEY	SMEARY TREBLE
MUSICALITY	BASS LACKS DETAIL

SCORE

22/33⅓

ROBERTS RT100

SEMI-AUTOMATIC USB TURNTABLE

£250 *www.robertsradio.com/uk 03330 142505*

Celebrating its 85th birthday, audio company Roberts releases only its second turntable… **Paul Rigby** reviews the RT100

Roberts has a deserved reputation for building and selling quality radios – from those early days, when their range was stuffed with valves, to its current line-up that boasts NFC connectivity, SD card slots, USB, streaming and more. Despite the fact that it has, way back in the dim and distant past, produced a turntable of its own, no one familiar with the brand associates it with vinyl. That's about to change, with the newly launched Roberts RT100 semi-automatic turntable.

And a nice-looking deck it is too, with its wood-veneered plinth projecting a sense of maturity and cool elegance.

On the front-left of that plinth is a circular, push-button speed selector offering both 33⅓ and 45rpm, while a straight arm with angled headshell sits on the right. That headshell is removable, allowing you to change cartridge types on the fly. On top is an aluminium platter, topped by a thick rubber mat. Around the back are a range of sockets to allow you to either utilise an external phono amplifier or use the built-in model that Roberts supplies. The latter will help those on a budget and allows you to plug the turntable directly into powered speakers – a useful configuration for those looking for a small-footprint hi-fi chain – or to use the turntable with an amplifier that doesn't include its own phono amplifier. We should add that an external phono amp will enhance sound quality immensely. So, when cash allows, upgrade to one.

A USB port on the rear allows you to hook the turntable up to a computer to 'rip' your vinyl to a digital file, with the Audacity software free to download.

The semi-automatic feature can also be turned on and off. Switched on, you will be asked to cue the tonearm onto your record, but the turntable will lift the arm off the record when it's finished, returning the arm to its cradle.

NECESSARY FORCE

The cartridge is an Audio-Technica AT-3600L, which provides a conical stylus. For optimum results, we'd advise changing to a cartridge sporting an elliptical stylus to enhance sonic detail.

The company recommends setting a tracking force of between 3g and 4g, which would logically suggest a compromise of 3.5g. I'd advise ignoring both of those figures and plumping for 2g to prevent vinyl wear. However, you may suffer from tracking issues on some details at this weight.

ROCK MUSIC IS THIS TURNTABLE'S REAL FORTE. IT ENHANCES THE INHERENT MUSICALITY OF THIS GENRE, OFFERING BASS PUNCH, NO BASS BLOOM OR MIDRANGE SMEARING

The turntable's attractive appearance is the work of Roberts' in-house engineer, although it is partly a Chinese OEM design – not a damning revelation, and certainly not unusual – but something that you may wish to factor into your buying decision. You'll see the arm Roberts has used populating numerous DJ-favoured decks from the likes of Numark et al, and the turntable bears more than a passing resemblance to the Lenco L-90.

Putting the RT100 to the test, vocals soared across a large soundstage, while there was more than enough detail to please.

Sound quality is variable.

Jazz-based music raises a question over the RT100's tonearm bearings, with a bright upper-midrange during crescendos, rather thin basslines and dynamic roll-off in the treble. Rock music is this turntable's real forte, however. It enhances the inherent musicality of this genre, offering bass punch, no bass bloom or midrange smearing and a midrange freedom that's eminently listenable.

The RT100 understandably lacks the bass authority of more expensive models, while dynamics are restricted and midrange is slightly veiled. That said, there is a real sense of fun when listening to this turntable, especially with dynamic music. The Roberts RT100 is a real rocker. ●

VERDICT

PROS	CONS
LOOKS GOOD	OVERALL BUILD QUALITY
PACKED WITH FEATURES	MIDRANGE VEILING
SET-UP AND EASE OF USE	LIGHTWEIGHT BASS
MUSICALITY	

SCORE

22/33⅓

ROTH VA4
ACTIVE SPEAKER SYSTEM

£199 *www.rothaudio.co.uk*

Despite its diminutive footprint, Roth's active amp-and-speaker system surprises **Paul Rigby** with its volume and imaging capabilities

On the face of it, British manufacturer Roth's VA4s look like any number of compact speakers designed for bookshelf or desktop placement. That's where the similarity ends, however, as the VA4 is an active-speaker design, containing all the necessary amplification required to make your turntable sing. Just plug in your record deck and off you go.

The active-speaker approach has a major advantage over passive designs, which is that the bespoke onboard amplifiers are tailored to match perfectly the drive units, avoiding the oft-made mistake of mismatching components.

Roth's VA4 incorporates a 40-watt-per-channel Class D amplifier, along with a built-in phono stage to boost the signal from your turntable's cartridge. Additionally, the system offers great connectivity – via stereo RCA, 3.5mm mini-jack and optical digital inputs – to hook up any other analogue or digital source; the VA4 can also be paired with a Bluetooth audio device. The master speaker's back panel features a dual-action volume control/input selector, an output for the connection of a subwoofer and, most usefully, a USB port to charge a smartphone, tablet or iPod.

A remote control additionally provides controls to boost or cut treble and bass, along with a reset button to restore the factory tone settings.

Each speaker measures 220x140x170mm (HxWxD) and contains a 102mm mid/bass driver (woofer) and 25mm treble unit (tweeter),

with a frequency response of 60Hz–20kHz. All cabinets come in black with options of red, white or black high-gloss front baffles; detachable cloth grilles are provided to protect the drivers from prying fingers.

Active speaker systems require mains power, so the VA4's master unit features both an IEC power socket and on/off switch, along with terminals to connect the slave speaker with the 290cm length of speaker cable, which is included in the package.

Powering up, an LED illuminates green on the master unit – visible when the front grille is removed – changing to red when the system is in standby or muted, and blue when a Bluetooth source is connected. Roth Audio recommends placing the speakers a minimum of 20 to 25cm from a rear wall for best tonal balance, and this proves to be essential to achieve good bass response. The VA4s incorporate rear-firing bass-reflex ports which emit a lot of low-end energy, so space behind is needed for the bass frequencies to fully develop.

Initial listening tests were carried out with the speakers sited on high-mass Target stands in free space, fed from my reference Thorens TD124 turntable. Spinning the 20th anniversary reissue of Radiohead's *OK Computer*, I was greeted with a fulsome sound that belied the VA4's diminutive dimensions. Interplay between guitars and percussion on *Paranoid Android* was finely etched and the speakers were unfazed by the track's wild dynamic swings.

The lowest bass-guitar notes of *Karma Police* were revealed with much of the weight, if not tautness, of larger and more expensive speakers; while Thom Yorke's spine-tingling close-mic'd vocal on *Exit Music (For A Film)* was presented clearly, remaining distinct from its coating of reverb.

Swapping the classic Thorens deck for my Rega Planar 2 turntable, I placed the speakers on top of my office desk and was immediately struck by the consistency of performance when replaying the same tracks. The VA4s proved unfussy over placement, so long as sufficient space was left behind them, and equally happy being asked to play a variety of music.

The gently propulsive groove of Dusty Springfield's *Son Of A Preacher Man* (*Dusty In Memphis*, Philips 1969) was conveyed with ease – Dusty's delivery sounding both smooth and smoky – while crude Studio One reggae recordings by the likes of Ernest Ranglin and The Skatalites delivered plenty of low-end welly.

Acoustic jazz was well served, with Herbie Hancock's Blue Note classic *Maiden Voyage* showcasing the speakers' impressive imaging capabilities, in terms of both stereo width and depth of soundstage.

I felt the VA4s' default tone setting was better suited to listening at lower volume levels. With the wick dialled up – and this system can play surprisingly loud – I found a slight reduction of treble produced a more cohesive sound.

Roth's active system performed exceptionally well at its price point, never once sounding lean, mean or harsh, in the way that budget systems often do. In conclusion, then, for anyone wanting to experience the warmth of vinyl replayed through an elegant, compact package, the VA4s could well be the perfect choice. ●

VERDICT

PROS

PLUG-AND-PLAY CONVENIENCE

SMOOTH, FULSOME SOUND

COMPACT SYSTEM

CONS

PROMINENT BASS

SLIGHTLY DETACHED TREBLE

SCORE

29/33⅓

HOW TO BUY CARTRIDGES

Cartridges are an essential part of your turntable – and they can make or break your music experience. **Paul Rigby** provides some background and a few purchase pointers…

Cartridges are those boxy-looking blocks that hang off the end of your turntable's tonearm. Some people refer to them as the 'needle', while more knowledgeable users might casually throw the word 'stylus' at the issue. But both of these names refer only to the pointy bit that makes contact with the groove itself. The cartridge is actually the stylus and the housing that it sits in. Inside this often cuboid-looking chassis, you'll normally find all kinds of delicate and sensitive metals, plus tiny magnets and the like. Cartridges come in all shapes, sizes and colours and, more importantly, prices. The more expensive variants tend to feature higher-quality builds, advanced technologies and a more exotic array of materials. All are tasked to enter into the grooves of your vinyl collection and draw out music to please the finest of audiophile ears… Yet there are several pointers that you need to be aware of.

MM OR MC?

Broadly speaking, there are two principal types of cartridges. There are more, actually, but there are two popular variants: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC).

Both types refer to the inherent technologies underlying the creation of each cartridge. I'll sidestep the dry technical details of exactly how each works here, but suffice to say that MM cartridges tend to be cheaper than MC cartridges. On the other hand, the latter tends to be more complicated to build, often features state-of-the-art technologies and, ultimately, produces a much better sound. So, why don't we all use MC cartridges, all of the time, then? Well, because MCs are often much more expensive to build and then buy than your typical MM designs – and MC cartridges demand much more from the host turntable and the rest of your hi-fi.

By 'demand', I mean that an MC cartridge needs a higher-end turntable to be able to perform at its very best. That can include a low-noise operation, high-quality engineering and top-quality components. In theory, a cheap-and-nasty turntable can run a high-end MC without a problem. That is, it will make a musical noise. The problem is that the cheap turntable will provide such an extreme bottleneck, in sonic terms, that you'll probably get only around 10% of the possible performance from the MC cartridge. Hence, such a pairing really isn't worth it. The rule of thumb? Decks up to £1,000 really should be using MM cartridges, while turntables over £1,000 should be using MC. That's a very rough guideline and there are exceptions to be made, sure, but that rule will get you by for now.

STEREO VS MONO

Most of us will be playing stereo vinyl, but there are an awful lot of mono recordings out there, especially second-hand. I have

The mechanics of your cartridge have a surprising effect on the overall sound quality of your system

Image www.soundfowndations.co.uk

THE RULE OF THUMB? DECKS UP TO £1,000 REALLY SHOULD BE USING MM CARTRIDGES, WHILE TURNTABLES OVER £1,000 SHOULD BE USING MC

Image www.ortofon.com

Image
www.soundfowndations.co.uk

Clearaudio's high-end Essence MC cartridge provides stylish sonics

hundreds of jazz vocal, pop and rock LPs in my collection from the late 40s to the early 60s that are mono. I also have a host of new pressings that are mono. Playing such recordings with a stereo cartridge is entirely possible, but you won't get the best out of a mono groove by using a stereo cartridge in it. You'll hear between 50 and 60% of the available sonic information.

There are two issues here. Firstly, stereo cartridges move in three dimensions, including side to side and up and down. Doing so provides the motion for creating a full stereo soundstage. Mono cartridges only ever move side to side. Hence, the inherent technology is different and a stereo cartridge finds it tougher to track a mono cartridge successfully. Even throwing a mono switch on an external phono amplifier doesn't really aid the stereo cartridge at all. You need a dedicated mono cartridge.

The problems move on from there… I'll keep this brief and won't go into too much detail here but, broadly speaking, mono LPs released before 1965 (ish) featured grooves 1mil wide; after 1965 (ish) the mono grooves were 0.7mil wide. Hence, to obtain maximum performance, you really need the right-sized stylus for the right-sized groove. If you ever buy a mono cartridge, you should be able to see the stylus size in the specifications for that cartridge. That said, even if you use a mono cartridge in the wrong groove (and you can do that without damaging the groove), then it will still sound far better than a stereo cartridge.

HINTS AND TIPS

When you buy a cartridge, or when you buy a turntable with a freebie cartridge included, if you look at the specifications for that cartridge, you'll normally see a bit of information on the stylus itself. Normally, it will tell you what type of stylus shape it holds. Take note that if your stylus tip is conical, then you need to be aware of a couple of points. Firstly, conical stylus tips are very forgiving in terms of running along damaged vinyl and extracting music from such dodgy discs. The downside of conical stylus tips, though, is that they don't track every single bend and turn of the groove. They tend to 'average out' the information, if you like. This means that you won't be getting the most exacting sonic performance from a conical. It will be very good indeed, don't worry about that, but you can do better… at a price.

If you buy an MM cartridge with an elliptical tip, for example, then this far more slender and shapely stylus tip will come into contact with more of the groove. Hence, far more information will be retrieved. What do we mean by that? Lots of subtle enhancements, really. Small bits of musical information they may be, but added up together, they will give your music more accuracy and precision, a more organic feel and a greater tonal realism. Hence, if your turntable arrives with a default cartridge sporting a conical stylus tip, don't despair. The music reproduction will be very nice indeed, I'm sure. Just bear in mind that a cartridge upgrade will probably be in your favour when funds allow.

CARTRIDGE BUYER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

What cartridges should you buy? Here's a broad selection from three different price points. This is no more than a suggested list.

BUDGET UP TO £100

This is a popular category with plenty of quality designs. Here's just a small selection…

AUDIO-TECHNICA AT95E

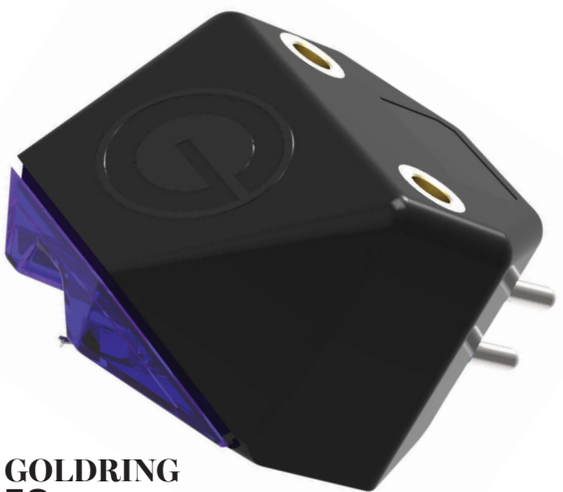
PRICE £30
EU.AUDIO-TECHNICA.COM

A very popular MM budget cartridge that can be used to upgrade default cartridges that arrive with many low-cost turntables. It's a great budget choice and has been around the market for a long time, but for a good reason… it's a quality design.

ORTOFON 2M RED

PRICE £85
WWW.HENLEYAUDIO.CO.UK

A stalwart of Ortofon's MM budget range that adds a touch of extra class over and above the usual budget fare out there. It's easy to install, too. It's an ideal base that can be upgraded to a 2M Blue, just by changing the replaceable stylus.



GOLDRING E3

PRICE £100
WWW.GOLDRING.CO.UK

A moving-magnet design based upon Magnetic Duplex Technology (the idea behind the technology is to improve stereo rendition). Includes an aluminium cantilever and a super-elliptical stylus. The cartridge uses a V-shaped magnet system to enhance stereo separation and sound quality is superlative.

MID-RANGE £100 TO £400

With more budget, you'll get more features and elements of finesse…

ORTOFON
2M MONO

PRICE £240

WWW.HENLEYDESIGNS.CO.UK

As we explained earlier, a stereo cartridge can't really track a mono groove properly, losing precision and impact. This Ortofon features a 0.7mil stylus, which means that it's ideal for later-generation (ie, after 1965 or so) and more modern mono pressings. In mono terms, this is a value-for-money budget model.

GOLDRING
1042

PRICE £285

WWW.GOLDRING.CO.UK

Despite MC technology being inherently superior, many hi-fi users love their MM carts and actually prefer them to their MC brethren. The 1042 is a superb example of this. The chassis is made of Pocan, a glass-reinforced plastic, and features a special Gyger S stylus (being longer in the direction of travel). Offers high-resolution sound quality.

DYNAVECTOR
DV 10X5

PRICE £370

WWW.DYNAVECTOR.COM

It's very difficult to create a moving-coil cartridge that's of any real worth at this relatively low price point, but the Dynavector succeeds in that endeavour. Those who enjoy a full and big, yet controlled, bassline will love the Dynavector. The midrange enjoys lots of focus, too.

HIGH-END £400-PLUS

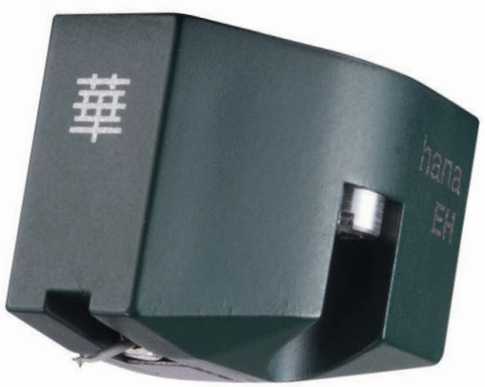
Cartridges which tend to utilise higher-quality components and fittings

HANA
EL

PRICE £400

WWW.AIRAUDIO.CO.UK

Manufactured by the Excel Sound Corporation (a producer of cartridges for 40 years), the EL is a low-output MC cartridge with an aluminium cantilever and Synthetic Elliptical stylus. Sound quality is broadly excellent, with a driving bass and a slightly warming midrange.



BENZ
MICRO ACE S

PRICE £695

BENZCARTRIDGES.COM

This MC cartridge includes the Benz Dynascan system with a Benz Micro Ridge stylus. This model features new coil windings and more, to enhance the design from previous iterations. Sound quality showcases a detailed yet spacious midrange, with a lively and vigorous bass that offers impact and heft.

CLEARAUDIO
ESSENCE

PRICE £960

WWW.SOUNDFOWNDATIONS.CO.UK

This MC cartridge is designed and built in Germany and includes pretty exotic components – a boron cantilever, the micro-line stylus and Clearaudio-patented moving-coil generator. The chassis comprises of an aluminium-magnesium alloy with ceramic surface layer. Sonics are stylish and elegant. ●

Part 2

VALVE-AMP REVAMP

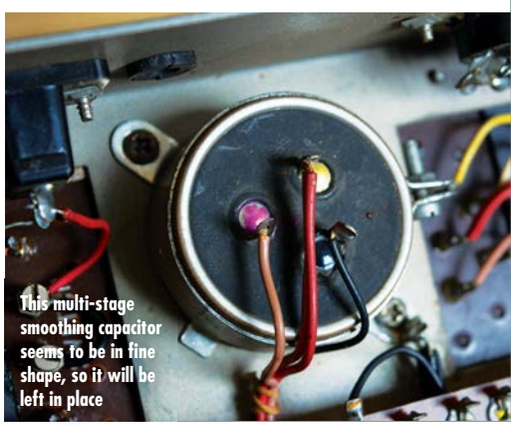
With the planning stage complete and all the new parts ordered up, **Huw Price** gets his electronic restoration of a vintage amp underway…

If you read the first instalment of this restoration project last issue, you may recall that this Leak TL/12 Plus was in fully original, but somewhat grubby, condition. So, first off, it needed a good clean-up; but before undertaking any work on electrical equipment, it must be made safe. Clearly, amps must be disconnected from the mains, but the real danger is the charge that may be lurking in the capacitors.

These capacitors can store potentially lethal amounts of charge for years and they must be drained to ensure safety. There are various ways to do this, but my preferred method is to use a drain resistor.

Since I often work on amplifiers, I soldered robust wires with crocodile clips onto a high-power 22k resistor. Heat shrink was applied to the solder joints and, although the resistor value isn't critical, knowing how to use it is. First, connect one clip to a ground point on the chassis, then connect the other clip to one of the positive tags of the filter capacitor. Leave it a minute or so, then place the clip onto the other positive tag of the filter cap and wait for a further minute.

Next, take your multimeter and set it to measure DC voltage. With the meter's negative probe secured to a ground point on the chassis, and your spare hand tucked safely in your trouser pocket, touch the positive probe to the positive end of each and every electrolytic capacitor to measure the charge remaining in the amplifier. Although 0V is ideal, you'll be okay with anything less than 1V. Once you've completed this procedure successfully, the amp is safe and work can begin.



This multi-stage smoothing capacitor seems to be in fine shape, so it will be left in place

Small quantities of Pledge sprayed onto a dry cloth were used to clean up the chassis

CLEAN-UP OPERATION

Even those who lack experience with these things will probably be aware that water is like Kryptonite to valve amplifiers. So, instead of soap and water, I took a dry cloth, applied a small amount of Pledge spray polish directly onto it and began carefully wiping. Very little effort was needed to remove the layer of dirt and the dark-gold finish soon began regaining its lustre. Some of the nooks and crannies at the base of the transformers and around the round capacitor cover were a bit hard to get at, but all in all, this part was fairly quick and enormously satisfying. This TL/12 Plus had spent its life in a purpose-built hi-fi cabinet, so I would describe its cosmetic condition as excellent.

The important thing is to avoid getting moisture or polish anywhere near the valve sockets. Use your cloth to wipe around the sockets, but don't attempt to clean the sockets themselves. I'll get onto that, but when I do, I'll be using proper contact cleaner rather than Pledge.

THE BIG GREEN 'UN

Last time, we drew up a list of the components that need changing. Although the intention is to swap out most of the resistors and capacitors, there is one resistor that you should leave well alone. It's a big 3W 100R resistor in the power supply, which is connected between the two stages of the canister smoothing capacitor. Its function is to protect the amplifier if something goes faulty and too much current is being drawn. In other words, it acts like a fuse and basically de-solders itself from the circuit. It's a cheap but vital component that will sacrifice itself in order to save the more expensive transformers and valves. Some restorers are tempted to remove this resistor because it will almost always look a bit gnarly and tatty, but really, it's better if you leave it alone.

A drain resistor is connected between ground and the positive terminals of the electrolytic capacitors to ensure the amp is safe to work on

The leaking fluid and swollen ends indicate that these two electrolytics need replacing

This 100R resistor does an important job protecting the amplifier and should be left in place

ELECTROLYTICS

You can sometimes tell when an electrolytic capacitor is past its best – or even dangerous. With vintage capacitors, telltale signs are swelling around the ends and leaking fluid. Two of the 50uF capacitors in this amp were showing both, so there was no option but to replace them. Some vintage-amplifier enthusiasts disapprove of component replacement unless absolutely necessary, but this approach strikes me as misguided. When reliability and safety can be at stake, I feel no qualms about removing electrolytic capacitors that were probably designed to last only a decade at most. It's worth remembering these are all 56 years old and will not be functioning as originally intended.

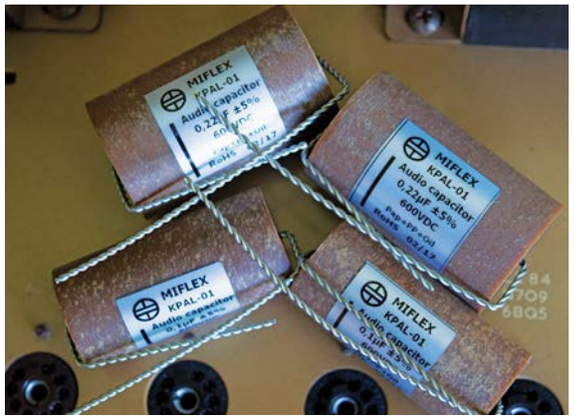
So out they all came, while I took photos to ensure the replacements went back in the right way around. Most electrolytic capacitors are polarised, which means one end is designated positive and the other negative. If you connect them up the wrong way around, they can

go bang. Once they were out of the amp, I took the opportunity to test them. None were particularly close to the stated value and three actually measured leaky at very low voltage.

HiFi Collective sent Sprague Atom electrolytics for this project. They are industry standard in guitar amps and I've found them to be very reliable and long-lasting. One of the larger electrolytics I removed contained a 16uF and an 8uF in a single casing, but it was replaced by two individual capacitors. The two big smoothing capacitors in the power supply measured fine, and changing those is a bit more complicated. There's also some confusion, because different schematics show a variety of values. The one that always pops up online says 32uF plus 32uF, but the schematic published in Stephen Spicer's Leak reference book *Firsts In High Fidelity* shows 200uF plus 60uF.

This seems oddly high for power-supply filtering, and all of Leak's other valve amps have much lower values. The schematic for the closely related Stereo 20 shows 32uF plus 32uF, but measuring the capacitors in this amp – and indeed the two other TL/12 Plus amps I own – 200uF seems closer to the mark. A couple of Leak restoration specialists advised me that these smoothing capacitors are usually just fine and can be left in place, if they test okay and look to be in good condition. Since the can capacitors in this amp tick both boxes, I decided to leave them in situ for the time being. However, I did replace both of the 50uF EL84 cathode-bypass capacitors and the 1uF capacitor tying pin 1 of the EF86 valve to ground. In this case, I used a film capacitor rather than an electrolytic.

IT'S BETTER TO PROTECT VALUABLE, IRREPLACEABLE COMPONENTS BY SWAPPING RELATIVELY CHEAP COMPONENTS

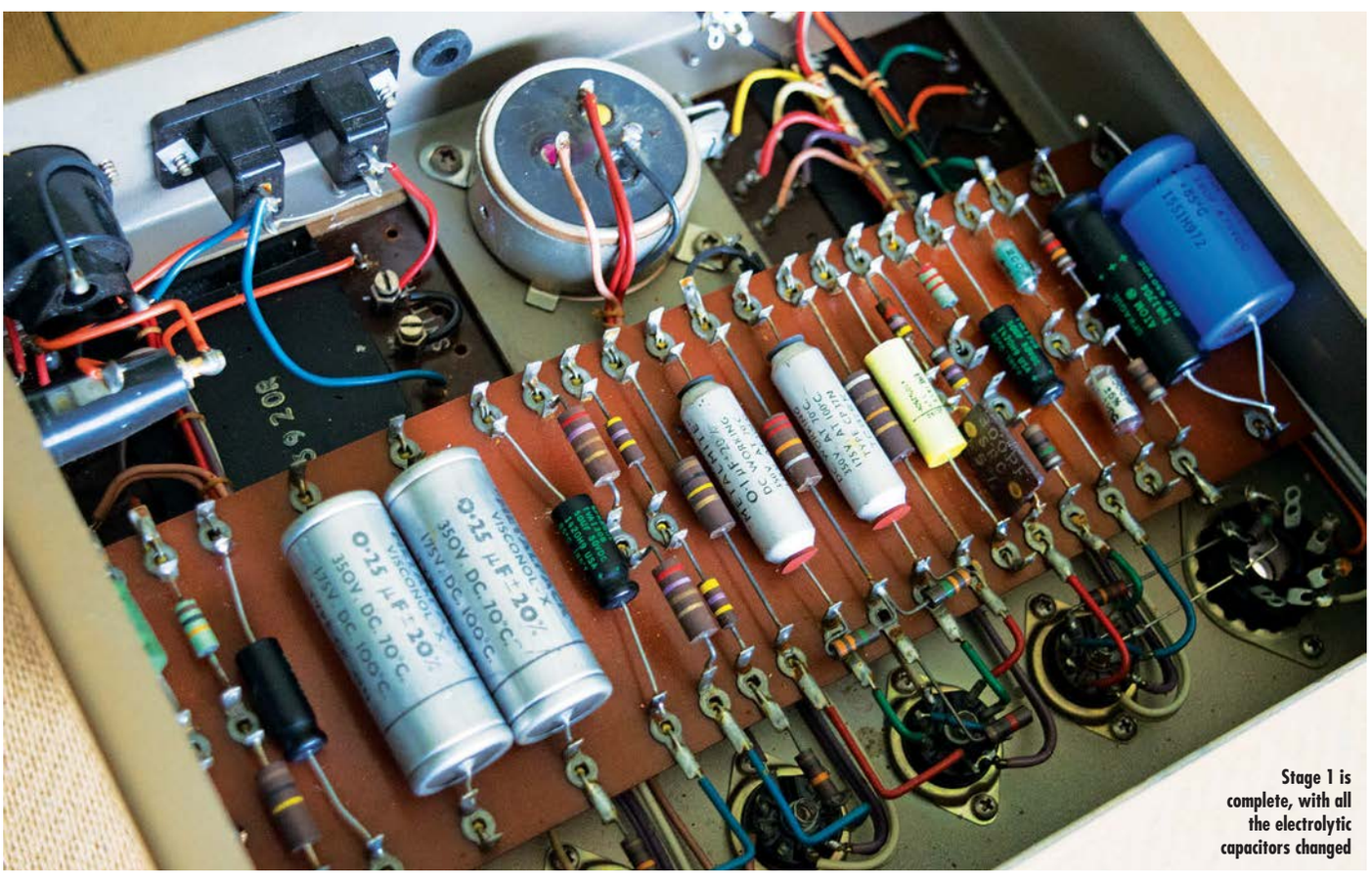


HiFi Collective recommended these Miflex signal capacitors to replace the old paper/oil types

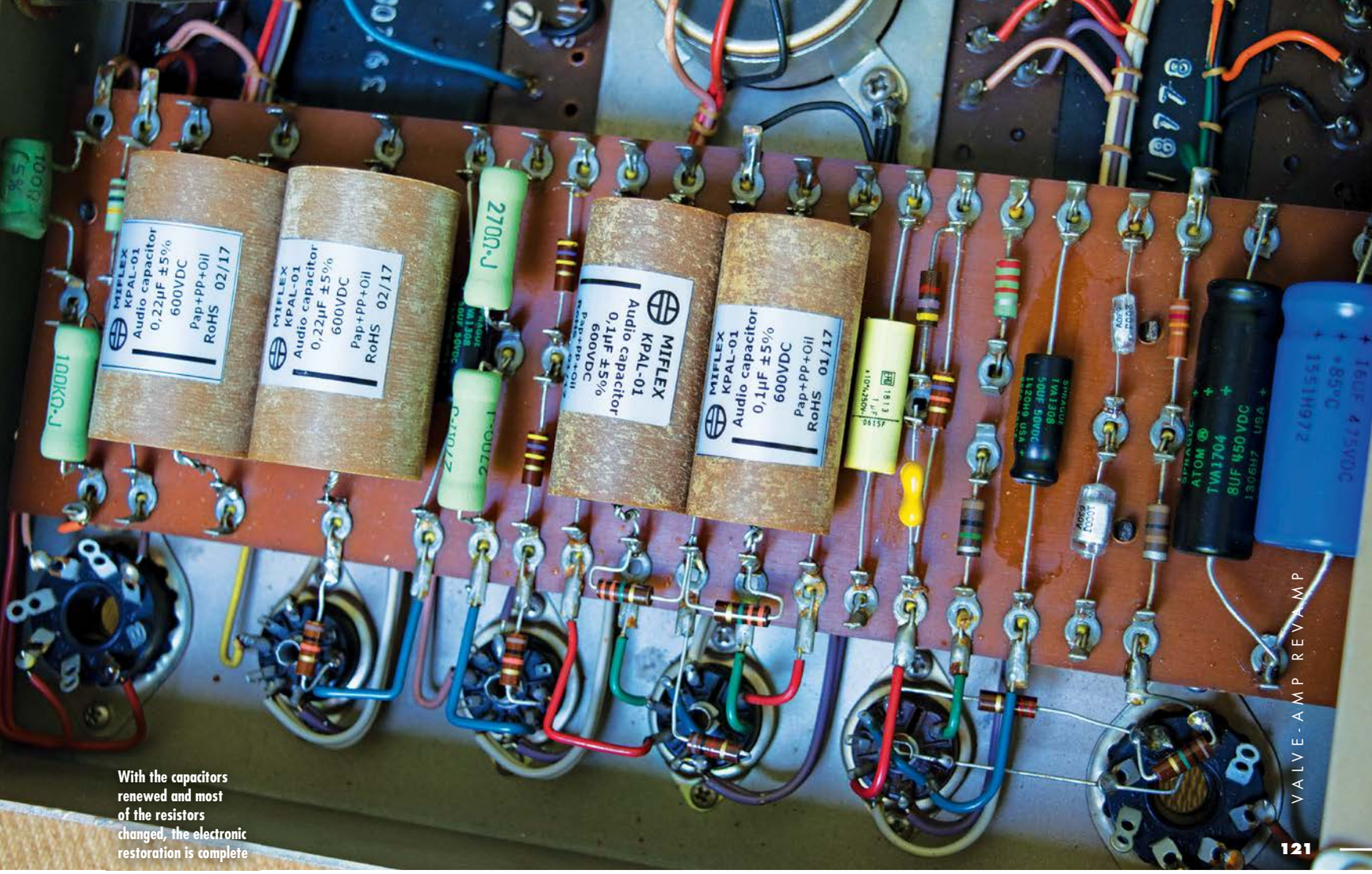
SIGNAL CAPACITORS

Like electrolytics, the signal capacitors can go leaky and, after several decades, they usually are. When the caps do leak, valve and transformer damage can result. My feeling is that it's better to protect valuable and potentially irreplaceable components by swapping relatively cheap components, but since the signal caps affect the tone of the amplifier, it's important for them to sound at least as good as the ones you're replacing.

The originals were paper/oil types and regarded as fine-sounding capacitors in their day. When I mentioned that I'm partial to



Stage 1 is complete, with all the electrolytic capacitors changed



With the capacitors renewed and most of the resistors changed, the electronic restoration is complete

the sound of paper/oil capacitors, HiFi Collective suggested KPAL capacitors from Miflex. They feature a paper-and-polypropylene dielectric with a high-purity aluminium foil electrode and the coils are oil impregnated utilising a vacuum-based technology. The housing is an insulated resin paper tube that certainly looks fantastic and the internals are encased in a potting compound to minimise susceptibility to external vibrations.

Conveniently, the labels also indicate which end corresponds to the outer foil. Although they will function in a circuit whichever way round they're connected, for lowest noise it's preferable to connect the outer foil to the end with lowest impedance to ground. If the capacitor is connecting one valve stage to another – for instance, phase-splitter valve anodes to power-valve grids – the outer foil should be facing the phase splitter. Referring to the TL12+ schematic, this applies to C4, C8 and C10. However, C9 is a 0.1uF capacitor tying Pin 7 of V2 to ground, so the outer foil faces away from the valve and is wired to the ground tag.

WHEN A VINTAGE AMP HAS GONE UNUSED FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME, IT SHOULD BE POWERED UP GENTLY

These Miflex caps are bigger than the originals, so fitting them into this amp was a tight squeeze. To do so, I splayed out the two EL84 cathode-bias capacitors very slightly. I also needed to change some of the resistors before fitting the caps, while they were still accessible.

RESISTORS

As I mentioned in the first instalment, very few of the resistors measured close to their specified values. Since the originals were carbon-composite types and I'm partial to their sound, I decided to replace like for like – for the most part. However, I felt I needed something more stable and lower in noise, with higher power handling in some parts of the circuit. Hifi Collective suggested Kiwame carbon-film types, because they are lower in noise than metal films and have a more 'natural' and 'vintage' sound that's closer to carbon comps. As well as matching the 100R 'fuse' resistor visually, the Kiwame resistors come with two power ratings – 2W and 5W. I went with 2W types for plate resistors (R9, R13) and 5W for the cathode resistors (R11, R19, R20) and the power supply (R7).

HANG FIRE

At this point, the amp has been pretty much rebuilt. Although I'm sorely tempted to connect a speaker and fire it up to enjoy the results of all this work, it's inadvisable to do so. When a vintage amp has gone unused for a long period of time, it should be powered up gently, and there is a procedure for doing so. Sadly, though, that will have to wait until next time, when I'll bring this old TL/12 Plus back to life and perform a handful of minor modifications that will make it integrate seamlessly in any modern hi-fi system. ●

The Vinylist

MARK JOHNSON

Reader **Mark Johnson** takes us on a tour of his collection, which ranges from Stiff Records to Third Man – and includes a Wurlitzer dedicated to The Cramps…

To be in with a chance of seeing your record collection in *Long Live Vinyl*, email your details and a picture to gary.walker@anthem-publishing.com

What was the first record you bought?
"In the summer of 1977, I was 14 and had never bought a record before. All the parents in my street put on a Silver Jubilee street party. The oldest kid set up his record player and had a box of singles. That's when I saw and heard my first-ever punk record. It was The Adverts' *One Chord Wonders* in a picture sleeve. Everything about it just struck a chord (no pun intended)… I went to Virgin Records in Leeds to buy it with my paper-round wage but I was told the sleeve had been deleted. I didn't want to go home empty-handed, so I bought the Sex Pistols' *God Save The Queen*, which I had to hide in my school bag for the first few weeks."

What genres and artists are you most interested in collecting?
"Punk, then post-punk and rockabilly. The first LP I bought was The Damned's debut, again because of the sleeve. Those early punk sleeves had so much energy. As punk faded, I moved on to bands like Killing Joke, Echo And The Bunnymen, the Furs and Bauhaus. Then, in '85, I started working in the Virgin Megastore in Leeds. That's when my tastes really broadened. Everyone in the store had an LP section to look after and I was given reggae, so I started collecting LPs by Steel Pulse, Culture, Prince Far I and Dr. Alimantado. I stayed with Virgin, then HMV for nearly 30 years. When Virgin became extinct, I rescued the lightbox out of the main window as a souvenir."

How many records do you have?
"Around 2,000 LPs and singles. Over the years, I've swapped and sold records with friends and dealers – either to make space for more records, or to boost a flagging bank balance."

What's the most valuable record in your collection? Do you have any special rarities?
"I bought Joy Division's *An Ideal For Living* 12" when it was first released – they were the first live band I ever saw. I also have an original *Spiral Scratch* EP by the Buzzcocks, which really kickstarted the whole DIY approach to releasing records. I also have the first two original Cramps 7"s, and I've been collecting Jack White's special Vault releases on his Third Man label."

What's the Holy Grail record that you'd most like to own?
"As a teenager, I always had two. The first was a 7" by The Damned called *Stretcher Case*, which was given away at the band's first anniversary concerts at the Marquee. I eventually tracked one down in the 80s for £40. The second was *So It Goes* by Nick Lowe, the very first single to be released on the Stiff Records label In 1976. I now have a few copies, including a copy only given out to radio stations."

What's your listening setup?
"Nothing fancy. My turntable is a TEAC LP-R500. I also have a Wurlitzer Niagara jukebox, which holds 80 7" singles. It looks and sounds great and there's lots of fun to be had changing the records. It's currently themed around The Cramps and I spent a lot of time (and dosh) tracking down many of the original rockabilly and garage singles The Cramps covered. The Sonics, Macy Skipper, The Novas, The Trashmen and Jack Scott are all on there." ●

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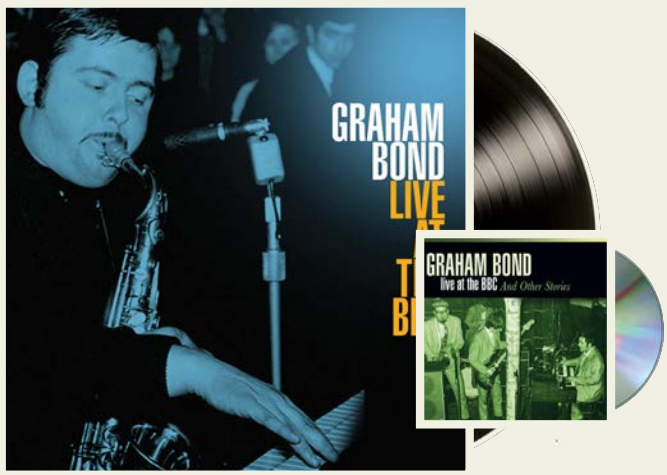

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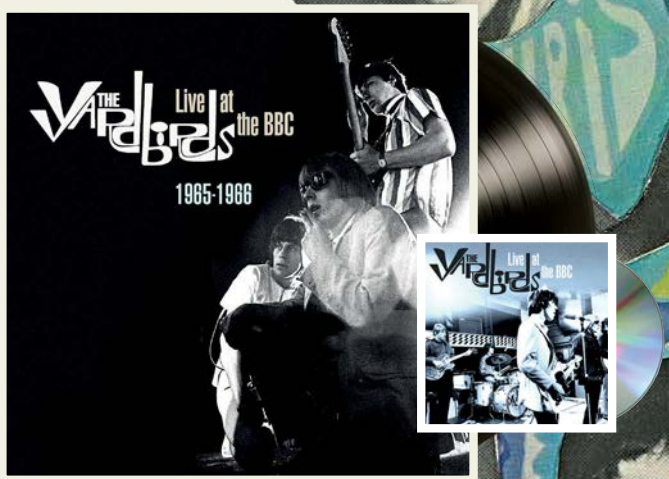

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